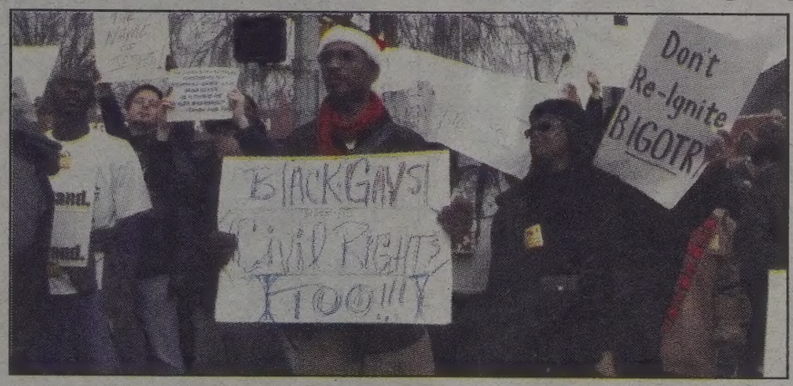
atlanta news

Black church march draws gay protesters

Bishop Eddie Long 're-ignites bigotry,' demonstrators claim

By RYAN LEE



About 50 protesters gathered outside the King Center Saturday morning to counter New Birth Missionary Baptist Church Bishop Eddie Long's march supporting a constitutional ban on gay marriage. (Photo by R.O. Youngblood)

The rainbow bandana tied around BJ Jackson's left arm caught the eye of many of people entering the King Center grounds Saturday morning, braving rain and cold to march in support of a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage.

"Yeah — we people," Jackson said defiantly, her head nodding and arms stretched out in a crucified position.

"Amen," said one woman walking by with her family.

The Dec. 11 "Re-ignite the Legacy" march — coordinated by Bishop Eddie Long, leader of the New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Lithonia — drew between 20,000 and 25,000 people, according to Atlanta Police Department estimates.

southern voice COVER STORY

The trek from Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s gravesite to Turner Field was in response to Long's call for black churches to become more vocal political players on issues like banning same-sex marriage, reforming the education and health care systems, and creating economic opportunities for minorities.

"It's time for us to get back into the conversation of the nation," Long told his followers before the march. "Get back into the conversation and allow those things that we believe, firmly — know there's a mandate for us to get [those] accomplished."

Peaceful protest

Jackson, board chair of the black lesbian group ZAMI, was among the first of about 50 gay and lesbian protesters who assembled on the King Center grounds at 8:30 a.m. hoping to counter the church march, which was set to begin at 9:45 a.m.

But the protesters were soon told by park security that they could not remain on the premises, so they moved their demonstration onto the streets of Atlanta's Sweet Auburn neighborhood. The protest's visibility and numbers grew once they gathered on Jackson Street, but they were soon told to move again.

Atlanta Police Officer CJ Franklin first told protesters they were violating a city ordinance prohibiting signs larger than 2-feet by 2-feet from use in demonstrations. When protesters refused to believe Franklin, the officer told them they were assembled on private property and were potentially blocking traffic.

There is no city ordinance restricting the size of protest signs, but the officer was referring to the police department's "Guidelines for a Peaceful Protest," said Sgt. Connie Locke, APD's gay liaison, in an e-mail interview.

"These guidelines are not city ordinances, but they are guidelines issued by the police department to all organizations that wish to demonstrate or protest to ensure public safety and public right of way," Locke said. "Any [larger signage] presents a safety issue for those utilizing the sidewalk."

Signs in hand, the protesters finally settled on the corner of Jackson and Auburn Avenue, the starting point through which all of the church marchers passed.

"I'm looking at the people just stream, and stream and stream down the [illegible] will wake up so early in the morning to support such a hateful message," Jackson said.

The gay protesters — organized by activists Kevin Bynes, Anthony Antoine and Craig Washington — encountered little hostility, beyond a man crossing the street and staring face-to-face with them.

The diverse group was also chided when they chanted, "Hey, hey! Ho, ho! Homophobia has got to go!"

Standing across the street, Wanda E. White of Atlanta leaned toward the protesters to mimic their chant, but replaced "homophobia" with "homosexuals."

"People live their lives like they want to, and I'm not here to judge them, but once you move God out of society, you have a big problem," White told Southern Voice.

As marchers passed the protesters, their comments ranged from "I've got nothing but love for you," to "You need Jesus" and "In the name of Jesus, wake up."

Carrying a torch lit from the eternal flame at King's tomb, Long marched past the gay protesters at 10:07 a.m., briefly glancing their way and offering a closed-lip smile.

"The worst behavior we had from the marchers was self-righteousness, but they were pretty well behaved," said Bynes, who works for AID Atlanta. "Many of them mirrored Bishop Long's smug attitude, sort of ignoring the fact that we were there.

"It's painful to know they could ignore the pain of LGBT people and what they did to us," added Bynes, who shouted "Shame on you," as Long marched past.

March motives questioned

Long — flanked by his wife, Vanessa, and march co-organizer Rev. Bernice King, the late civil rights leader's youngest daughter — led a river of Christians as wide as Auburn Avenue that flowed rapidly for 23 minutes before all of the marchers passed the gay protest.

The bishop was traveling this week and unavailable for comment, according to his staff. But Long issued a statement Dec. 8 saying the march "is not a demonstration to alienate or separate any group of people."

"This march was not derived out of an idea to protest same-sex marriage, but to present a unified vision of righteousness and justice," Long said in the statement.

[illegible] Defense of Marriage Act and a constitutional ban on gay marriages ratified by voters last month, activists questioned the sincerity of Long's display of influence.

"I think it was an exercise of self-aggrandizement," said protest co-organizer Washington, who works for Positive Impact. "And we were clear that Eddie Long was not only acting out of bigotry and homophobia, but he was also courting faith-based initiative money and getting in bed with Republicans by scape-goating gays."

Some black clergy are eager to cozy up to conservative Republicans in hopes of securing faith-based grants, said journalist Esther Kaplan, author of the recently released, "With God on Their Side: How Christian Fundamentalists Trampled Science, Policy & Democracy in George W. Bush's White House."

"It cannot be bad for your career as a black minister at this point to speak out against gay marriage," Kaplan said Tuesday. "There's a lot of interest in the Republicans and the Christian Right to find these black figurehead types who will give lip-service to their moral agenda."

Long's ministry received a $1 million faith-based, "individual development account" grant from the U.S. Administration of Children & Families, according to Bill Pierce, a spokesperson for the Health & Human Services office.

Black leaders speak out

Several prominent black clergy, civil rights leaders and politicians harshly rebuked the New Birth march, saying Martin Luther King Jr. would not have supported Long's message.

The critics included U.S. Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.); Rev. Joseph Lowery, former SCLC president; and Rev. Timothy McDonald III, head of the African-American Ministers' Leadership Conference.

State Rep. Tyrone Brooks (D-Atlanta), who along with McDonald is among the plaintiffs seeking to strike Georgia's gay marriage amendment in court, also condemned Long's march. The effort to co-opt black votes by focusing on moral wedge issues is a "waste of time," Brooks said.

"Because the Republican Party refuses to embrace issues that are very important to African Americans, it's going to be very difficult for this ploy to be effective," said Brooks, president of the Georgia Association of Black Elected Officials.

Black state legislators were gay Georgians' most solid ally during the gay marriage fight, with 46 of 49 black lawmakers voting against the ban.

State Sen. Vincent Fort (D-Atlanta) said he expects the Dec. 11 march to have little effect on that support.

"You have African-American leaders like Dr. Lowery and Mrs. [Coretta Scott] King engaged in this debate, so knowing my colleagues, I don't figure it will have a large impact," Fort said.

King's widow has been a staunch public supporter of gay civil rights.

The King Center did not respond to repeated interview requests about whether it supported the march. But the center, along with the city, granted march organizers a permit, according to Locke from APD.

Despite their comparatively low numbers, gay protesters said their presence at the march was a beginning toward changing attitudes about gay equality.

"As gay people, we deserve rights just as everyone else," said Terrell Whitaker, a College Park resident. "It was a small crowd, but we were a good crowd in spirits. I think [the marchers] heard us. I hope they did."

In addition to continuing the fight for their own dignity and rights, gay activists must do a better job of nurturing alliances with groups representing blacks, women and labor unions to stand with them under fire, Bynes said.

"The failure to partner more effectively has allowed for this kind of march to happen," Bynes said.

Gay activists now monitoring New Birth Missionary Baptist Church sent a mass e-mail this week about the church's alleged partnership with a Starbucks Coffee shop in Conyers.

But a spokesperson for the national Starbucks chain said the church's Web site is incorrect when it implies that the coffee store is donating coffee and pastries to New Birth's college ministry.

"The only relationship that store has with the church is a business relationship — they catered for the church, but nothing was [donated], it's all been purchased," said Starbucks spokesperson Alan Hilowitz.

The church "characterized [the relationship] differently than what it is," Hilowitz said.

Ryan Lee can be reached at rlee@sovo.com

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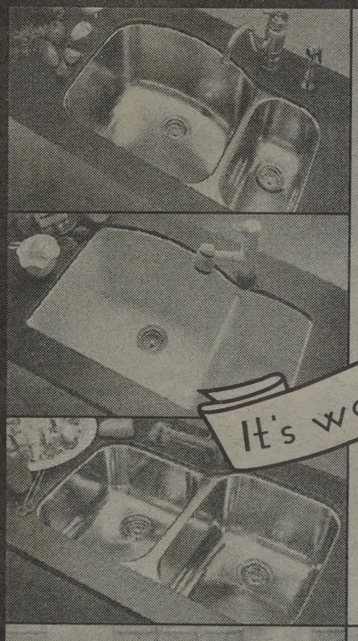

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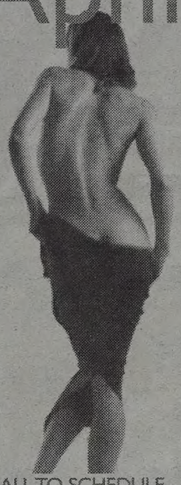

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Gay retailers offer suggestions for last-minute shoppers

DEAR SANTA, continued from Page 27

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Photos by R.O. Youngblood

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TIMELINE, continued from Page 44

2007

April 27, 2007

In a reminder of the bias facing gay parents that harkens back to the founding of Southern Voice, Elizabeth Hadaway's attempt to adopt an acquaintance's daughter, Emma, after a year for caring for the girl was halted by a Wilkinson County judge who then ordered the girl into state custody. After more than a year of court battles, Hadaway was reunited with Emma May 18, 2007. On March 24, 2008, a three-judge panel of the Georgia Court of Appeals reversed a lower court decision finding Hadaway in criminal contempt after the Emma was not returned to her biological mother.

Oct. 26, 2007

As HIV infections continue to rise among young gay men, SoVo took an in-depth look at why gay young men do not seem to be using condoms as often and why. Also front page news was a shooting outside the popular gay nightclub WETbar that police immediately denounced as a hate crime. A gay man was slightly injured. The alleged shooter was arrested Dec. 6, 2007, and faces charges of aggravated assault.

2008

Jan. 11, 2008

It's the end of a tradition: Atlanta Pride has to move out of Piedmont Park due to the state's severe drought. The event is relocated to the Civic Center and its date is moved from the traditional end of June to the July 4th weekend. Since the first small Pride march in 1971, the annual celebration has been held almost every year at the park at the end of June.

May 23, 2008

The California Supreme Court, one of the most influential in the country, overturned a ban on same-sex marriage in a landmark 4-3 ruling, although the state is likely to have a ballot measure in November allowing voters another chance to vote to ban same-sex marriage. Chief Justice Ronald M. George, writing for the majority, said, "In view of the substance and significance of the fundamental constitutional right to form a family relationship the California Constitution properly must be interpreted to guarantee this basic civil right to all Californians, whether gay or heterosexual, and to same-sex couples as well as to opposite-sex couples."

Gay Atlanta 2028: Rising to our challenges

Longtime leaders on the biggest changes of the last two decades and the issues that will shape our future

GAY ATLANTA 2028, from PAGE 49

ERIN SWENSON

Courtesy ErinSwinson.com

The last 20 years:

"This probably shows my personal bias, but I think the biggest challenge we continue to face in this particular part of the country is religious prejudice against people who are LGBT. I think religious prejudice is our biggest problem and probably sits behind our problems with the legislature. I think overall they believe it is somehow not compatible with Christian teaching, and shouldn't be encouraged, shouldn't be supported, and in fact should be discouraged at every turn."

The next 20 years:

"I think that will continue to be the biggest challenge over the next 20 years. I think the ultimately the rest of the country is going to be receptive to civil unions between two people of the same sex before this area is.

"The discussion I haven't seen that I would like to see happen is when we continue to have discussions about same-sex marriage, and opposite-sex marriage, we use terms that really don't translate to the transgender community. I think it's unfair to use terms of gender that are really more fluid than they are perceived. That is the conversation I would love to see happen, but that is probably just my own dream."

*— **Erin Swenson** moved to Atlanta in 1957, where she graduated from Sandy Springs High School in 1965. She is the first transgender person known to keep her ordination as a Presbyterian minister when she transitioned in 1994-96. She continues to lobby on religious issues affecting LGBT people.*

JEFF GRAHAM

The last 20 years:

"Certainly 20 years ago people were dying, so a focus on HIV and AIDS was something we just had to do. There is no greater impetus towards action than having your friends get very sick and die. Beyond that, it is a very obvious answer, back then I think the biggest challenge was coming out as an LGBT community. There were so many families across the country, and especially here in the South, that didn't think they had any gay family members; they didn't know any gay people. Looking at where we are today I think that's one of the reasons LGBT politics are moving as quickly they are, because there are very few individuals who can say they never met a gay person. … I think it makes all the difference in how we're perceived. We're no longer the outsiders that we were 20 years ago."

File photo

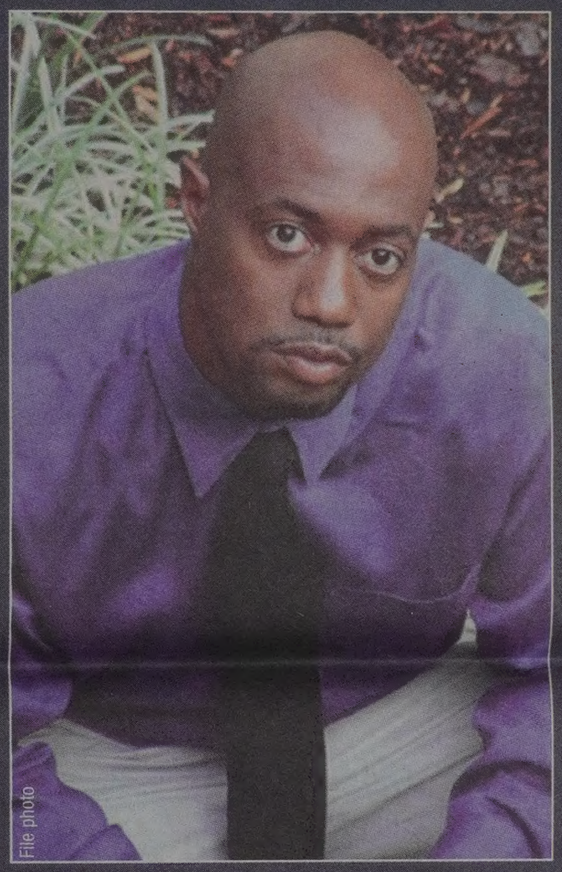
The next 20 years:

"The challenge is for legal recognition for our relationships, as a standard across the country. We're going to go through a period over the next decade where there is a patchwork of laws that cover us. Unfortunately we are not a society where people stay in one place, so people will find that they have moved from states with full marriage rights to states with no rights whatsoever. …

"The other issue I think is going to be incredibly important over the next 10 to 20 years is as our community gets older, [to protect our relationships.] Again we have to remember that not everyone in the LGBT community is coupled, and certainly as we get older, people who have been partnered, their partners will pass away and create issues that very much parallel our straight counterparts."

*— **Jeff Graham** came to Atlanta from Birmingham, Ala., in 1989. He served as the media coordinator for ACT UP/Atlanta, then moved to AIDS Survival Project, where he served as executive director for more than a decade. Graham took over as executive director of Georgia Equality earlier this year.*

CRAIG WASHINGTON


File photo

The last 20 years:

"I could say the biggest challenge could be the lack of a community center, but the challenge would be related to forces prohibiting that. Without a physical space for queer folk to meet and socialize it really leads to a lack of community. Without a physical space where you can meet and socialize, what community that does exist is limited to events, and the socializing that comes with that."

The next 20 years:

"The fact that we are in Atlanta is not lost on me. We have this strong and potentially visible community, but we're separated. I think the challenge is working through our divisive factors, so that we're acknowledging our differences and not seeing them as things that divide us. …

"I don't think that we have hit our potential yet. We have the chance to be a center for human rights, and I don't mean that as an euphemism for gay rights, but real, worldwide human rights. Obviously an inclusive community center would help with that."

*— **Craig Washington** came to Atlanta in 1992. He served as African-American Outreach Coordinator for AID Atlanta, developed the Deeper Love Outreach Program, spearheaded the African-American Outreach Initiative, is former co-chair of Second Sunday, and co-founded the Bayard Rustin-Audre Lorde Martin Luther King Jr. Day Breakfast.*

ALLEN JONES

The last 20 years:

"The biggest challenge was AIDS, and developing the infrastructure to serve those that are HIV positive and specifically with AIDS. In the beginning doctors wouldn't see them, funeral homes wouldn't bury them, so the gay community had to organize and provide those services ourselves. During that time is when I organized Helping Hands Atlanta, which provided the seed money for so many of those organizations."

Courtesy AEN

The next 20 years:

"I think we'll be facing the same things that everyone else is facing, straight or gay, because the issues will be children, home life, jobs, security. The issues will be same issues because I believe that specifically gay issues will disappear within the next 20 years."

*— **Allen Jones** was born in Conyers and grew up in Atlanta. He founded Helping Hands and founded the gay Atlanta Executive Network in 1992.*

MARY ANNE ADAMS

File photo

The last 20 years:

"The biggest challenge of the last 20 years is a really broad question, and I think a difficult question to answer. I don't think there has been a big enough sea change to where I can tell you that was eradicated, or this was eradicated, I can't. We are still facing some of the same problems that we were facing 20 years ago.

"There has been some coming together but not enough for me to proudly say we have come so far. I saw 20 years ago and still see an erasure of people in our community who are poor. I saw 20 years ago and still see today a huge gap between the genders."

The next 20 years:

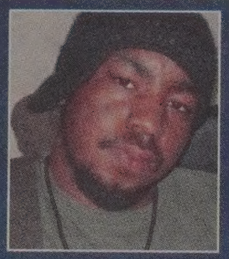
"The fight for being fulfilled as a human being, no matter what your orientation might be, and that means we have a seat at the table for those who might identify themselves as trans, or questioning, and not just those who identify themselves as gay or lesbian.

"I want to hasten to say that I don't see one fight bigger than any other fight. I would hate to see us make priorities and say that one fight is more import than other fights… I would not say that marriage is more important than a living wage, or being able to raise your children, or being able to be trans. They're all important and we have to continue to take them on."

*— **Mary Anne Adams** arrived in Atlanta from Jackson, Miss., on Sept. 25, 1988, following a woman. She stayed in the city, founded Zami, an organization for African-American lesbians, and is co-founder of the Bayard Rustin-Audre Lorde Martin Luther King Jr. Day Breakfast.*

Gay Atlanta 2028: The next generation

Gay youth envision their lives and our community 20 years from now



"In 20 years, I'll still be here in Atlanta. Eventually, I want to have my own business as a party promoter, and in 20 years I should have a kid or two. [Twenty years from now, our community] is going to be much stronger, more open and hopefully more understanding since some people don't get it. I think it'll be 10 times stronger than what it is today."

— *Toni Hill, 21, Decatur*

"Ultimately, in 20 years, I would like to be at the prime of my medical career somewhere deep in the Sahara of Africa or up in the vast mountains of Nepal curing infectious diseases and bringing lifesaving tools of modern medicine to those who need them most. As one of the largest cities in the U.S, I feel as though our community is greatly looked upon, and we're letting that responsibility slip. I hope that in 20 years, the gay Atlanta community will be rejuvenated as the acceptance of our lifestyle progresses on a daily basis. Gay bars will not struggle to stay open as straight bars and other establishments threaten their business, and our community will continue to grow more respect as our society evolves."

— *Lauren Smith, 20, Decatur*

"Twenty years from now, I'll be still living in Atlanta, of course, in my career as a psychologist, more than likely with kids, hopefully married. I see myself being successful, opening a small hair salon on the side. Gay Atlanta is going to do nothing but grow. We're going to get more recognition and respect, be more comfortable, and not have secret lives."

— *TJ, 21, Gwinnett County*

"I'm not exactly sure what I'll be doing in 20 years, but I'm hoping it's something to do with neuroscience and psychology. I also hope to be in a loving relationship and being able to have the choice to get married here in Atlanta instead of having to travel to other places in the U.S. I believe that Atlanta will be the next hub for gay and lesbian attractions, possibly the next West Hollywood. Also, I'm hoping it will be the groundbreaker for gay and lesbian rights in the South."

— *Kacey Gentry, 17, Cumming*

"In 20 years, I'm going to be very happy and very accomplished. I'm going to be where I want to be, and that changes as you grow. Atlanta has changed so much in the three years that I've been gone, so I think it'll be very different in 20 years, but not as different as we want it to be."

— *Cameron Nico, 20, New York*

"In 20 years, I'll be a stylist and working on my music. I think Atlanta will be more open than it is now, and I hope gay marriage will be legal and accepted."

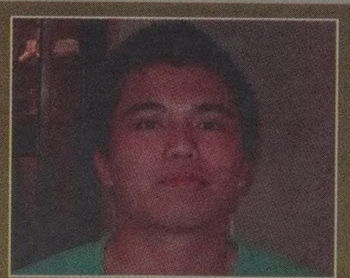
— *Ashley Ulrich, 18, Dallas*

"Twenty years from now, I will be a teacher and I will be dancing and teaching people how to dance. I'll be staying in Decatur still and hopefully be with someone or just be content. Just looking back at how it was last year, I don't think the gay community was as close as it is now. In 20 years, there will be legalized marriage, less need to hide and less taboo. It'll be a more comfortable environment."

— *Dewayne Brown, 20, Decatur*

"Hopefully, I won't be in Atlanta [in 20 years]. As a native, the first thing I want to do is get out. I picture myself living in a world without HIV, a world where I can get married, living in a much safer world and being fierce. I just want to be healthy and married, and in 20 years, I'll be grasping onto my late 30s and holding on for dear life. I think the gay community in Atlanta will be totally spread out, not just in Midtown. I don't think Midtown will be synonymous with 'gay.' I see it as being a lot more liberal and continuing to grow."

— *Thomas Byrd, 18, Midtown*



"In 2028, I'll probably in Italy with my partner somewhere. But Atlanta's my home, so I'd come back. We'll probably see our first gay mayor in 10 years with so many gay people moving here. I think it's definitely better for us now, and we need to create a positive image so we're not pushed out. I want everyone to feel like they're welcome."

— *James Naval, 21, McDonough*

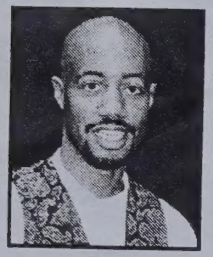
"Truthfully, I have no idea what I'll be doing in 20 years. I'm young, so at the moment I'm just trying to live my life. I'll probably just be graduating. Twenty years from now, laws will change, and with those laws, hopefully we'll be able to have civil unions and hopefully our culture will be assimilated. With that, people are going to feel more comfortable. Relationships among races are going to change, with more diversity in the crowds at clubs and restaurants."

— *Matt Andler, 19, Midtown*

"Hopefully, gay marriage will be legalized in 20 years, and accepted in the military because that's what I'd like to do. Hopefully I'll be in Colorado, because I've always liked it. I don't think the Atlanta area will change that much, but I think gay marriage will be accepted and all over Atlanta will be gay."

— *Kayla Lanning, 18, Stockbridge*

— Compiled by Rob Beck



VIEWPOINT

Defining 'gay agenda' not up to white elite

by CRAIG WASHINGTON

For the patriarchal-minded, connections between gay rights, abortion and affirmative action don't register a blip on the gaydar screen.

The debate over the gay rights agenda is apparently more about whose agenda it is than what that agenda comprises. ("Defining the gay agenda," news, Sept. 9).

There is much to be said about the so-called gay agenda, the relevance to it of issues like affirmative action and abortion rights, as well as the stark omission from *Southern Voice* coverage of activists who are not white.

The result demonstrates how what is *not* said often speaks volumes about what *is*. The unspoken at hand here is the confluence of racism, sexism and class elitism that has confounded any and all constructs of "community" among lesbian, bisexual, gay and transgendered folk.

Traditional gay activism in the U.S. routinely exercises the familiar patterns of exclusion that mark white patriarchal attitude and behavior. There is a saddening dearth of will among its mostly white, privileged vanguard to fess up and deal with the multiple diagnoses of bigotry and dominance.

Before some self-appointed arbiters scurry to outline things for themselves and others, we should first ask what we mean when we say "gay agenda."

The very basis of a prescribed agenda for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered folks to follow rests on fault lines of assumptions and arrogance. It presumes that a handful of white, well-funded organizations have the right and capability to plot the movement course for all of "us," including the very people they typically exclude.

It presumes a level of unity that "we" have never achieved. This is not to imply that we have no common ground beyond our sexual orientations. It is to underscore that the most crippling failure of the gay liberation movement is its refusal to acknowledge and embrace the liberation struggles of people of color.

Key representatives often highlight the parallels between homophobia and racism to assert the legitimacy of gay liberation only. To reference historical movements of black people—like with a borrowed freedom song at a Gay Pride march—and ignore or patronize the concerns of modern-day black people is both unconscionable and dumb.

Ironically, in a *Southern Voice* article that addresses race matters, the reporter did not quote anyone who isn't white. And this is from a newspaper with staff members who have expressed the desire to be more racially inclusive.

As for the issue of affirmative action, its opponents often define these programs as race or gender "preferences," or reverse discrimination. Such arguments tend to overlook two of the most indisputable facts about the United States:

First, for women and people of color, the proverbial playing field is not now even; and second, it never was.

There is no evidence that indicates the collective suffering of white male Americans because of this redress. In fact, white men, gay and straight, still access white male privilege, whether they realize it or not.

But the gains enjoyed by disenfranchised groups are well documented. When and where these programs are dismantled, the damage is swift and palpable.

Some queers only recognize the value of affirmative action as it relates to their specific identity. Like parasites that leave no benefit for their hosts, they are largely silent and absent from black people's struggles.

Save for the MLK March in January—a high-yield political cash cow—you wouldn't catch half of these queers on Auburn Avenue any other time of the year.

As for abortion rights, lesbian activists have stood alongside their hetero sisters at the forefront of pro-choice work for decades. Many lesbians and others believe that anti-abortion efforts both reflect and reinforce the kind of democratic facism that threatens to curtail not only women's autonomy but the unalienable freedoms of sexual identity and expression.

For the patriarchal-minded, such connections are often invisible because the singular issue may not register a blip on the gaydar screen.

For those who recognize that tolerance of the subjugation of women is detrimental to any social justice movement, abortion is unquestionably relevant.

Asking the question, "what is the gay agenda" seems to answer itself. To ask the fervent plea posed by Labelle, "What can I do for you? What can you do for me?"

But it need not invite mere mutual backscratching. Not if it springs from an understanding of networking oppression systems and not if it is guided by the foresight of progress we may reap from the cross-pollination of our struggles.

Neither universal conformity nor expanded mission statements are necessary to realize this "dream." It does require a divestment from racist ideologies and practices. It depends on our commitment to do the work in our villages and support the villagers down the road.

It demands that we create services and institutions that serve our basic needs and not the comforts of the elite. Maybe then we could integrate coalitions of movements that will crack the yoke, break the chain and bring forth gains as infinite as freedom itself.

Craig Washington serves as co-director for Southerners On New Ground (SONG), an activist organization that helps to build progressive movement across the South by integrating work against homophobia into freedom struggles, and work against racism, sexism and economic injustice into "lesbigaytrans" organizing.

A Black Church Week Of Prayer

Craig Washington

The Black Church Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS blessed Atlanta with seven days of prayer, education and fellowship. From Sunday through Saturday March 3–9, seven churches/chapels hosted HIV-focused programs providing spiritual sustenance and practical information. Pastors, congregants, service providers, and friends infected and affected convened all over the city to spread healing balm throughout the black community.

This event is actually based upon the original Harlem Week of Prayer established in 1987 by Ms. Pernessa Seal, founder of Balm in Gilead (a technical support agency for churches providing HIV/AIDS services). The CDC (Center for Diseases Control) funded training for the Week's planning committee to implement the programs. This Week was designed to equip the faith community with the means to address the needs of its people.

Healing commenced on Sunday, of course, with the Opening Worship Service at One Accord Community Church of God in Christ (C.O.G.I.C.) in Decatur. With Dr. T.A. Body presiding, the church rocked with a serious praise and worship ministry. Pastor Body's sermon indicted the black Church for failing to welcome all members of the communal family. He mixed humor with passion to illustrate the hypocrisy of church-going Christians and blessed the Week of Prayer as God's commission to the Church. Monday's program held at the Interdenominational Theological Center Chapel in the West End, featured a progressive seminar-fashioned service to educate the pastors. "Homosexuality, AIDS and the Church" and "Can the Church Save Our Children" were among the topics covered.

PHOTO: BY RON SINGLETON

Panelists from local AIDS ministries discussed the joys and challenges of such service. Volunteerism was the theme for Tuesday's service held at the "gay-friendly" Hillside Chapel and Truth Center in the Cascade area. Highlights included a processional by Clark Atlanta University students, speaker Dorothy Triplett, formerly of the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20

The Week of Prayer

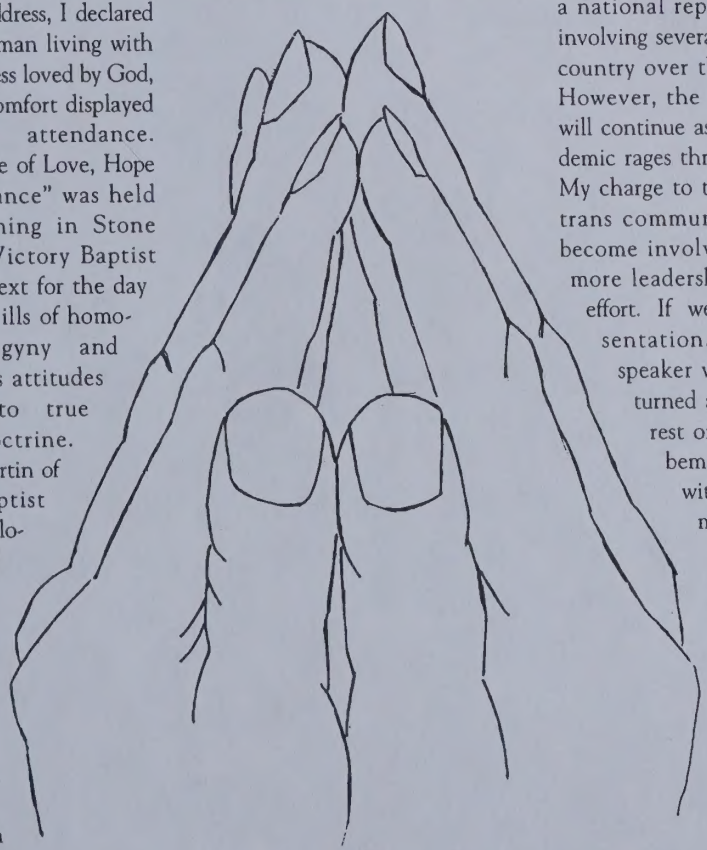
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

CDC, and presentations by local volunteer coordinators from AID Atlanta, A.E.S.M. and Sisterlove. On Wednesday morning, Wesley Chapel United Methodist Church hosted "Positively Living With HIV/AIDS" which provided information pertinent to PWAs such as nutrition tips, drug trial data, women's resources, legal rights, etc. Sevenanda, the Little 5-Points healthfood oasis, had a booth displaying organically grown fruits, beverages and literature. The evening service at Wesley featured a foot-stompin' praise and worship by Prophet Michael Dowdell and a special dance ministry performed by preteens.

During my address, I declared myself as a gay man living with HIV who is no less loved by God, despite the discomfort displayed by some in attendance. "Worship Service of Love, Hope and Remembrance" was held Thursday evening in Stone Mountain at Victory Baptist Church. The text for the day confronted the ills of homophobia, misogyny and AIDSphobia as attitudes antithetical to true Christian doctrine. Pastor Kathi Martin of Emmanuel Baptist Church led an eloquent prayer of remembrance for loved ones who've made their transition. Ironically, Victory Baptist allegedly declined an openly gay man's offer to address the congregation, in favor of an infected woman. Was it plain ole homophobia or excessive caution? Is there a difference?

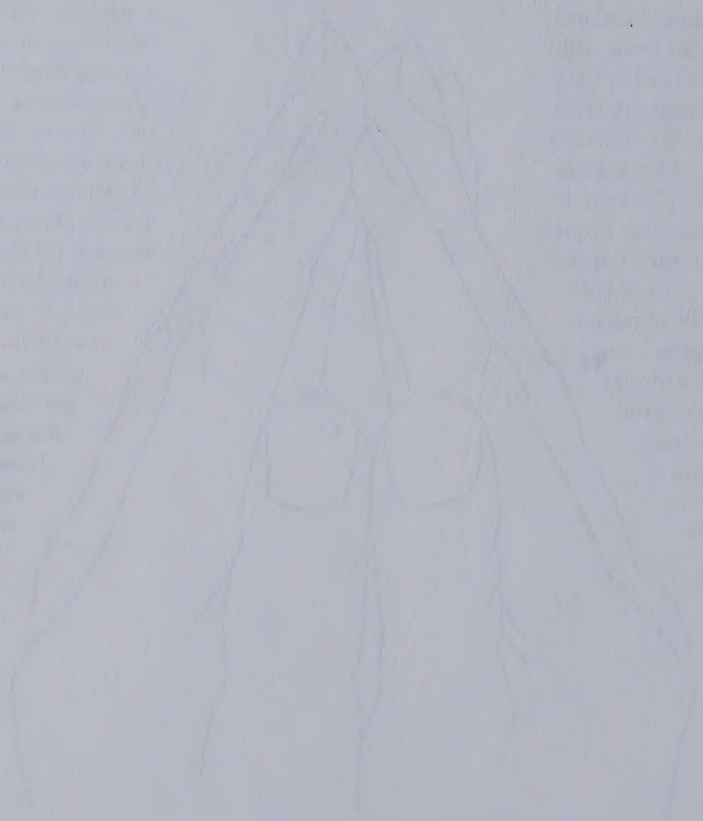
"Taking Charge of Our Minds, Bodies and Future" focused on reaching our youth and was hosted by Ray of Hope Christian Church in Decatur. Youth outreach workers engaged the audience in role play exercises demonstrating adults' inability to discuss sexuality openly with their young.

The last day of this momentous Week began early Saturday morning (7 AM!) at the Piedmont Park gazebo. A handful of stalwarts braved the chill-to-the-bone weather to sing and pray for the victory of this "movement." Minister Marvin Quick administered a stirring call for unity among the Week of Prayer planners. Mid-morning service was conducted at Believe & Receive Christian Sabbath Fellowship, home base for Pastor Julia Robinson, Chairperson for the Week of Prayer Planning Committee. Song and dance ministry were offered and Ms. Pernessa Seal herself made a surprise appearance. We returned to Wesley Chapel for the Closing Service.



Proclamations from President Clinton, Mayor Bill Campbell, and Decatur Mayor Elizabeth Wilson were read aloud. Minister Marvin Moss delivered a poignant message recalling the loss of his brother due to AIDS. As Pastor Robinson put it, "This is not the end, this is only the beginning."

The Week of Prayer is part of a national replication project involving several sites across the country over the next 3 years. However, the Week of Prayer will continue as long as the epidemic rages through our village. My charge to the black/gay/les/trans community is that we become involved and take on more leadership roles in this effort. If we had more representation, no openly gay speaker would have been turned away. Let us not rest on our laurels and bemoan the situation without action. We must reclaim God's love as our own as well as remembering that the Creator loves us just us as we are!



atlanta news

Gay center loses STD testing clinic

Former director says dwindling community center 'needs to go'

By CHRISTOPHER SEELY

Fulton County dealt another blow to the Atlanta Gay & Lesbian Center on June 30, when it removed a donated staff member who performed free HIV and syphilis testing.

The cutback occurred as a result of the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention terminating a grant that it provided the county, said Dr. Steven Katkowsky, director of the Fulton County Department of Health & Wellness.

"At the present moment, there isn't anyone there," Katkowsky said.

The blow comes as the Center property is for sale, the Web site is defunct, and the Center's prominence in Atlanta has dwindled. According to Craig Washington, the facility's former executive director, it's time for the facility to throw in the towel and for new leaders to create a new community space.

"Atlanta needs and deserves a center," Washington said. "We currently have no place that brings a representation of all the different gay communities together. We are too separated, mostly by race and gender."

Washington served as executive director from January 2001 until March 2003, a position paid for by Fulton County.

Until the summer of 2003, Fulton County paid roughly $46,000 a year for two staff positions at the Center: the executive director and a health clinic nurse.

Bill King worked as the part-time clinical nurse for the Center from 1995 until February 2003.

But Fulton County stopped funding those positions last fall, about six months after Washington and King resigned. The CDC grant money was then tapped to place a disease investigator at the Center.

Budget cuts prompt county withdrawal

From December 2003 until June 30, Fulton County provided money to place John Broere, a disease investigator, at the Center through funding from the CDC's statewide Syphilis Elimination Project, Katkowsky said.

The current home of the Atlanta Gay & Lesbian Center has been put up for sale by Donald Smith, a board member who acknowledged purchasing the property after initially claiming it had been bought by an 'anonymous backer.' (Photo by R.O. Youngblood)

Currently, the county is exploring resources to place another person at the Center to continue testing and counseling for HIV and other STDs, he said.

"It's a high priority, not in the sense that the Center is a high priority," Katkowsky said. "The function is a high priority. One of the things that we need to do and keep doing is we need to be accessible to all different, diverse groups in the community."

On July 21, the Fulton County Board of Commissioners approved the county health department's fiscal year 2005 contract with the state Department of Human Resources, Katkowsky said.

But the amount approved is about $1 million less than it was for fiscal year 2004, and the county health department assess whether it is fiscally possible to place at least one person at the Center, he said.

Lolethia Chapman, board chair and sole spokesperson for the Atlanta Gay & Lesbian Center, did not respond to repeated interview requests over the last several weeks.

Chapman stepped up to become board chair a week after Washington left the Center for a position at Positive Impact, an AIDS service organization in Atlanta.

In May 2003, little more than a month after Chapman became board chair, four longtime board members resigned, citing Chapman's "autocratic" nature in their resignation letter.

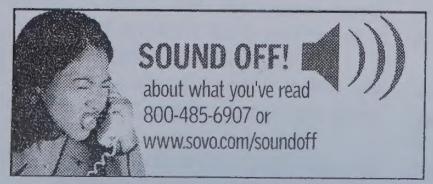
'Center needs to go'

Since the full-time executive director position was cut, the Center fell into a state that is beyond repair, Washington said.

"The current Center needs to go," Washington said. "The current leadership is not demonstrating the vision required for the community center we need."

Washington said the Center lacks trustworthy, ethical leadership.

Please see GAY CENTER on Page 19



atlanta news

Gay center accused of 'squandering' resources

GAY CENTER, continued from Page 9

"What's going on at the Center reflects who is at the helm," he said. "It's been a squandering of potential and of what coffers there were."

Larry Pellegrini, a longtime gay activist and lobbyist, said it is not too late to revamp the Center, but questions whether a gay community center is needed in the city, which has developed a myriad of organizations that already respond to different needs of gay residents.

"It seems like the LGBT community in Atlanta evolved with more of a fragmented collection of substitutes for one center," Pellegrini said.

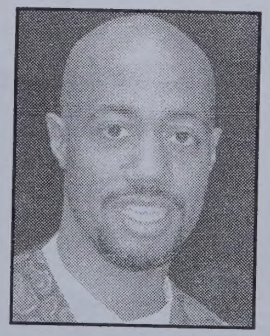
Pellegrini served on the board of Lambda Center, launched in 1993 to provide an alternative to the Gay & Lesbian Center, which formed in 1976.

"We saw that there was something called the 'Gay Center' in Atlanta, but a lot of people didn't think it reflected the needs of the community," Pellegrini said.

In 2000, the Lambda Center closed and combined with forces with the Atlanta Gay & Lesbian Center, but the center never achieved what it set out to do as a result of funding shortfalls, Pellegrini said.

"I just always hoped it would do well and get the funding it needed but it just never did," he said.

One of the keys to a successful gay center is constantly assessing community needs, according to Shelia Healy, executive director of the National Association of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Centers.



The Atlanta Gay & Lesbian Center has squandered its potential as a resource and community gathering space, said **Craig Washington**, former executive director. (Photo by R.O. Youngblood)

The first step for Atlanta to achieve a center with the same status as those in Los Angeles and New York is for a small, diverse planning group to hold publicized meetings, she said.

Los Angeles and New York both operate with budgets that exceed $5 million annually. Last year, the Atlanta Gay & Lesbian Center operated with a budget of $40,000 to $50,000, according to Marta Shen, a former treasurer for the facility who has since left the board.

"It sounds like there is a crying need for community discussion [in Atlanta]," Healy said. "You guys have a tremendous city and tremendous community. How do you get the community to reinvest in the center?"

Property acquisition details still unclear

Dr. Donald Smith, who stepped down as board chair when Chapman took the helm, purchased the current Center property at 170 11th St.

But just one month after the grand opening at the Center's new space in June 2003, Smith put the property up for sale.

The property acquisition of 170 11th St., and a neighboring property at 174 11th St., resulted in legal problems for Smith, Chapman and the Center, when former Center employee Melvin Stringer filed a lawsuit in August 2003.

Stringer replaced Washington and served as interim executive director of the Center from May 2003 to July 2003.

Stringer filed the suit against Smith, Chapman, and the Center on Aug. 6, 2003, claiming wrongful termination, breach of contract, slander, libel and unlawful rendering of legal services.

After Stringer was terminated, and the lawsuit ensued, Fulton County ended its funding for the executive director position.

Motion for a joint settlement was filed in Fulton County Superior Court on Dec. 30, with a clause that the case won't close until Sept. 30, 2005 to assure neither party reneges on the settlement.

The legal problems for the Center began after Stringer received a termination letter on July 29, 2003. Prior to serving as executive director, Stringer was hired as the Center's philanthropic advisor with an undisclosed contract that allocated Stringer 10 percent of all donations he procured for the Center.

Smith initially credited Stringer with finding an "anonymous donor" to pay for the Center's $460,000 Midtown home in interviews with Southern Voice last winter, but Smith later revealed that he himself was the donor.

For identifying Smith as a donor, Stringer claimed he received partial payment of $21,088 that was allegedly owed to him for securing Smith's $460,000 house donation.

The remainder of the philanthropic advisor fee had not been paid to Stringer in August when he filed his lawsuit and Stringer asked the court to make Smith pay him $24,912 for breach of contract.

But in a counter suit filed Sept. 15, an attorney for the Center and Smith stated that Stringer owed at least $26,000 to the Center and $27,650 to Smith.

MORE INFO

Atlanta Gay & Lesbian Center
170 11th St.
Atlanta, Ga. 30309
404-874-9890

Catered affair

Leave it to the pros to take your holiday event from so-so to sensational

SO VO SOUTHERN VOICE **DINING**
MIKE FLEMING

Caterers can provide all the place settings, food and service to make your holiday party sparkle without the stress of doing it yourself. (Photo courtesy A Legendary Event)

THINK YOU DON'T HAVE THE MAKINGS OF A fabulous holiday party? Local caterers and event planners beg to differ. Locally gay-owned businesses work all year long to help make you the gem of your wedding, business lunch or other special event, but they have scads of special tricks up their sleeves during the holidays.

"It's not too late; it can still be done if you stay flexible," says Karla Kreitner, an event planner based in Stone Mountain. "And it can basically be done on any budget."

Kreitner specializes in finding resources from music to catering to decor that give each client a personalized event.

"I want everyone to have the event they want, not some cookie cutter," she says. "Maybe it's a signature cocktail or coffee drink; it could be the invitations, whatever it takes to bring it to the next level."

Tony Conway, the proprietor and mastermind behind A Legendary Event, agrees, and says he is still booking parties between now and the end of the year.

"How nice is a four-course dinner for six of your friends?" he asks. "We can provide the china, the glasswear, the silver, the chef and even a service staff."

From two to 10,000 and from $55 to $125 per person, but possibly for much less, Conway and his crew can help as little or as much as you need, he says.

"We can just provide the staff if you're a cook, or the chef to cook your favorite recipes, or just help you decorate for the holidays with our floral design team," he says. "It can be the little things like that, all the way up to full service including valets, arranging the menu, doing the invitations and finding the music."

A Legendary Event auctioned off a dinner for six at Toy Party, and their new "stocking stuffer" for 2009 is a gift certificate that seats eight for four courses, hand-passed food items while guests arrive, plus the table settings, cook and service staff. This year, it also includes a single-malt scotch tasting.

"We've partnered with Diageo for the scotch," he says. "They are a very gay-friendly company who just received another 100 percent on the HRC equality scale."

BUT WHAT IF TOUGH ECONOMIC TIMES CALL for cutbacks?

"The number one thing I do not recommend is foregoing your holiday party," Kreitner says. "It's all about the fellowship with your friends and family, and at the holidays, especially in tough times, we need to spend time together and have our traditions.

"We just might need to be more conscious of the budget as we plan," she adds. "We can have our traditions and our fun and figure out how to make it work."

Kreitner says more people are going in on shared events like progressive dinners and brunches to create a memorable experience that costs less.

"Maybe your signature cocktail that usually has pomegranite has cranberry juice," she says. "Maybe guests assist by bringing their favorite dishes. Figure out how you can be with the people you love and enjoy."

Conway is on the same page when it comes to simplifying for budgetary reasons, but he also makes recommendations for those who can't even begin to spend any money on catering. He and another gay caterer, Keith Hand of Bridge Catering, both suggest a few tips to do it yourself and still make it special.

"Plan," Conway says. "This is the number one priority to make it easy. Decide what you want and do as much as possible ahead of time. No one wants to be up all night the night before."

"Keep it simple," Hand adds. "Not only should you do what you can in advance and just put the finishing touches on it, but generally don't overcomplicate any aspect of it. Just do two or three really nice dishes, keep the decor to clean lines and limit your color palette to one or two."

Both men also suggest one "extravagant" item can make an otherwise plain menu special. Perhaps you do a wonderful hearty stew with cornbread and a salad, but you pick up a statement-making dessert from a baker. Or maybe you spring for the rack of lamb and serve standard sides.

"Have one thing that really says 'Wow!'" Hand says.

"In general, don't fuss," Conway adds. "Pay attention to the details that will be noticed. I also like to tell people that the best hosts are cognizant of who they invite. Make for the best conversations, and make sure no one has any food allergies or dietary restrictions like kosher or vegetarian options, and be sure to have non-alcoholic alternatives to drinks."

"We do this every day," says Hand, who also offers an online ordering service for box lunches. "But to the average person, it can be overwhelming. Don't let that happen."

Most of all, all three of the event planners we spoke to say it's all about you. "One-stop shopping" is how Hand describes the business of catering. "You make a phone call, we walk you through the decisions, and you can worry about what you're going to wear."

"Relax and enjoy," Conway agrees. "The whole reason we exist is so that the host can enjoy their own party. You spent enough time getting your home ready, doing the lawn ... we come in and you don't have to worry about any of that detail or stress and pamper yourself.

"And I think most of all, people love that once the party is over, we clean it all up and it looks like no one was ever in your house.

Bridge Catering
163 Ponce de Leon Ave.
404-815-8888
www.bridgecatering.com

Kardon Events
5808 O'Hara Drive, Stone Mountain
770-935-0065
www.kardonevents.com

A Legendary Event
1380 West Marietta St.
404-869-8858
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Bold bubbles

Celebrate a new movement in sparkling wines

SO VO SOUTHERN VOICE **WINE** DON HACKETT

DON'T BE MISTAKEN. WHEN WE SAY BUBBLES, we're not talking about the tragic drag queen you saw perform at that seedy bar in South Georgia; we're taking about sparkling wine. This is the time of year that many people pop open a bottle of bubbly in celebration of family and friends. And while Champagne is typically the sparkling wine of choice, this could be the year that you impress your fellow revelers by standing up to the establishment and proclaiming, "It's time for a change!"

There is a movement growing among top restaurants and wine retailers around the country, away from the large French Champagne houses that have dominated the sparkling wine sector for years to a celebration of quality sparkling wines that have been overlooked for way too long.

Sparkling wine is made all over the world, not only in Champagne. And while it is true that Champagne is still the standard by which all others are compared, it is certainly not the only high quality sparkling wine out there.

Sparkling wines from other regions that deserve a place on your holiday table aren't always easy to find, but the better wine merchants will have at least a couple of these options from which to choose.

CALIFORNIA It is undeniable that grapes grow just as well in California as they do in France. That is why many of the top French producers also make sparkling wine right here in the US. Moët & Chandon, Mumm and Taittinger all produce sparkling wine in California made from the same grapes (typically Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Pinot Meunier) using the same techniques, specifically a method called either Méthode Champenoise (the Champagne method) or Method Traditional (the traditional method).

The method calls for the second fermentation — the first makes the alcohol, the second makes the bubbles — to occur in the bottle. It is almost universally accepted as the superior method of making sparkling wine.

So if there is one thing you should be looking for on the label, it is the words Méthode Champenoise or Method Traditional, regardless of where it is produced. Look for bottles priced anywhere from $15 to $30, although you will also find bottles priced much higher.

ITALY The Italians love sparkling wine. They make it in many different regions, in many different styles, and from a host of different grapes. The premier sparkling wine producing region in Italy is Franciacorta, located in the Lombardia region in northern Italy. They follow many of the same winemaking techniques as Champagne and use the same grapes (Chardonnay and Pinot Noir).

Italians will tell you that wines from Franciacorta are every bit as complex and expressive as those from Champagne. Unfortunately, the prices are similar also. But if you are looking for an incredible bottle of bubbly that is not the same thing you have been drinking for years, Franciacorta is the answer. You should spend at least $30 on a good bottle.

If you prefer to walk on the sweeter side of the Italian street, try Moscato d'Asti. Produced in Italy's Piemonte region, it's regaining popularity after faltering in the '80s due to an overabundance of cheaply made wine. Remember the television commercials, "Martini & Rossi on ice. That's nice."?

These days, there are a host of well respected Moscato d'Asti producers making a variety of styles at very reasonable prices. Plan to spend from $10 to $20. You will find more expensive bottles, but the quality generally doesn't justify the higher price.

SPAIN One of the best values in sparkling wine today is Spanish Cava. Cava can be produced in six different winemaking regions in Spain, but most of it comes from the Penedès region about 25 miles southwest of Barcelona.

Spanish wine laws require that it be made in the traditional method and that it be made from a selection of six different grapes, of which Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are two.

Quality Cava can be found for $10 and up, which makes it an incredible value and a great choice for those occasions when multiple bottles are needed.

A holiday toast doesn't have to be the same old Champagne. (Photo via Stock Xchange)

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U.S. stalls signing U.N. rights statement

Gay-supportive document proposed by European nations

By LOU CHIBBARO JR.

International gay rights groups expressed concern that the U.S. had not yet signed a proposed statement this week calling on the United Nations and countries throughout the world to condemn discrimination and persecution based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

The statement, proposed by France on behalf of the European Union, was scheduled to be presented to the U.N. General Assembly in New York next week. More than 50 countries have signed the statement.

"The statement will call on all governments around the world to ensure that sexual orientation and gender identity are not subjected to criminal penalty, and that individuals are not executed, arrested or otherwise detained because of their sexual orientation or gender identity," according to the Council for Global Equality, a human rights group that advocates for gay and transgender rights.

Mark Bromley, the group's chair, said human rights advocates are hopeful the U.S. will sign the statement.

He said activists lobbying the State Department on behalf of the statement believed the delay in U.S. acceptance of the document was due to distractions related to the transition from the Bush administration to the new administration headed by President-elect Barack Obama.

The U.S. signed on to a similar statement focusing on the rights of gays and transgender people issued earlier this year by the Organization of American States. The OAS represents all 35 independent countries in North, Central and South America.

In 2006, the U.S. signed another gay- and trans-rights related statement before the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva.

"There's plenty of precedent for the U.S. to do this," Bromley said.

A spokesperson for the State Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Vatican created a stir in Italy last week when it denounced the statement as a disguised attempt to pressure countries into same-sex marriage. Vatican officials urged countries not to sign the statement.

Commentators for a number of Italian newspapers joined the Italian gay rights group Arci Gay in criticizing the Vatican for opposing a statement that the commentators said calls for an end to anti-gay persecution and has nothing to do with marriage.

A spokesperson for the Vatican Embassy in Washington did not respond to a request for comment.

Members of Congress are urging Secretary of State **Condoleezza Rice** to arrange for the U.S. to sign a U.N. statement that condemns discrimination and persecution based on sexual orientation and gender identity. (Photo by AP)

U.S. Rep. Tammy Baldwin (D-Wisc.), the only openly lesbian member of Congress, this week joined efforts to persuade the State Department to move quickly to back the proposed U.N. statement.

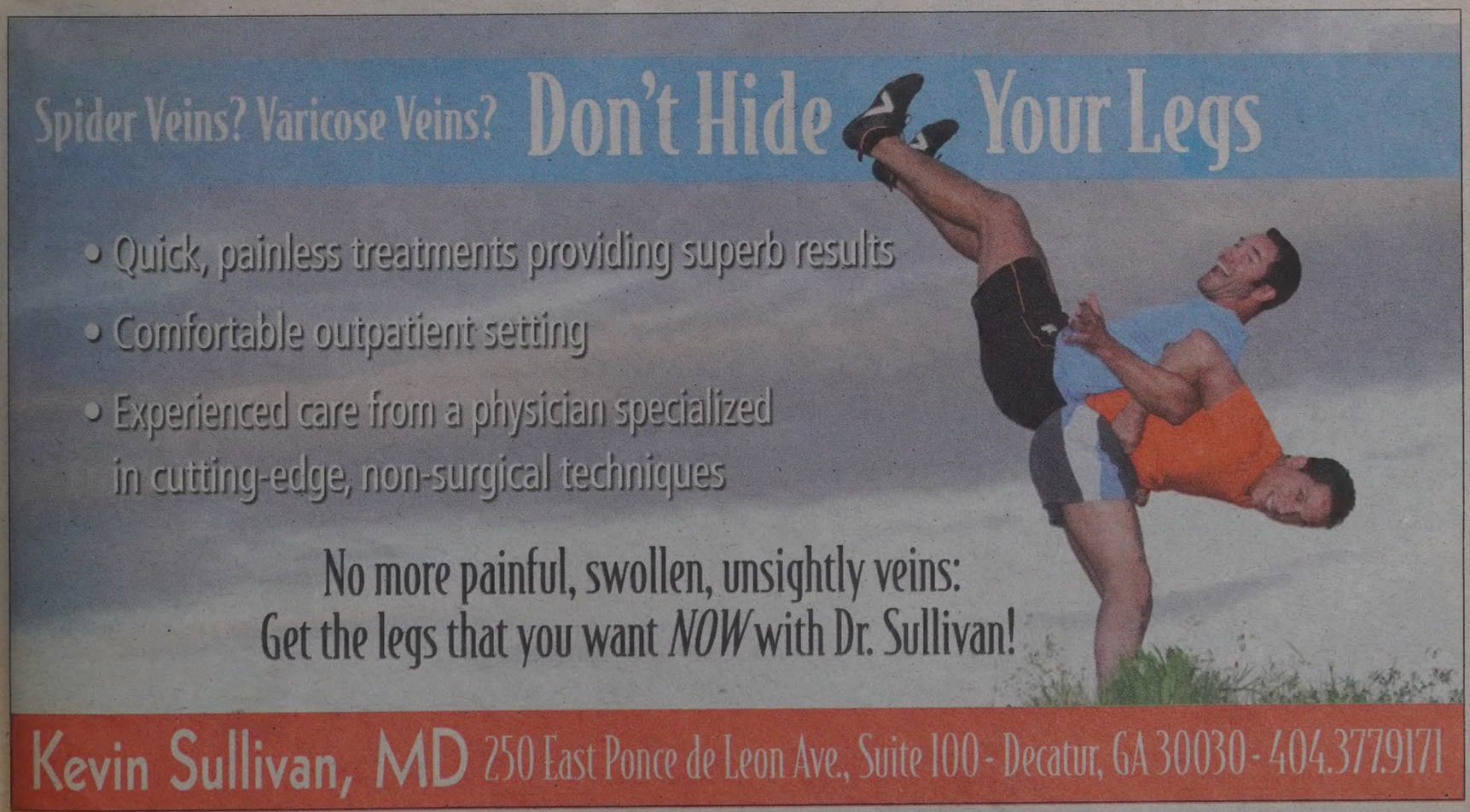
Baldwin, along with Rep. Howard Berman (D-Calif.), who chairs the House International Affairs Committee, and Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-N.Y.), who chairs the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East & South Asia, sent a joint letter to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice urging her to arrange for the U.S. to sign the statement by next week.

The three House members noted in their letter that supporters of the proposed statement had hoped to have it issued by Dec. 10, the 60th anniversary of the signing of the U.N.'s Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That document is credited with helping start the modern human rights movement.

Bromley said organizers of the U.N. statement have put off its introduction until next week to allow time for more nations to sign it.

In a fact sheet listing the goals and objectives of the proposed U.N. statement, officials with U.N. non-governmental organizations that support the statement said various agencies of the U.N. have issued similar statements condemning anti-gay discrimination and persecution in the past. They said the current statement marks the first time such a document has been presented to the U.N. General Assembly, the organization's governing body.

"In this 60th anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is particularly important to affirm the principle of universality: that all human beings are entitled to equal dignity and respect," the fact sheet says.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FRIEND or FOE

FRIEND

The Critics' Choice Awards announced its nominees for the best in film in 2008 on Dec. 9, and "Milk," the film about gay civil rights hero Harvey Milk, tied for first place with eight nominations.

Sean Penn as Harvey Milk (Promotional photo)

The "Milk" biopic, which stars Sean Penn and was directed by gay filmmaker Gus Van Sant, chronicles the political campaigns of Milk, who was elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 1978 and assassinated a year later by Dan White.

"Milk" received nominations for Best Picture, Best Actor for Sean Penn, Best Supporting Actors for Josh Brolin (as Dan White) and James Franco, Best Acting Ensemble, Best Director for Gus Van Sant, Best Writer for Dustin Lance Blank, and Best Composer for Danny Elfman.

FOE

When terrorists attacked multiple targets in Mumbai, India, taking hundreds of people hostage and eventually killing approximately 200 innocent people, the world watched in shock.

For Pat Boone, the Christian crooner, those graphic images of what happened in Mumbai are no less scary than the ones broadcast of people across the U.S. protesting in the streets against the passage of Proposition 8, which rescinded gay marriage in California.

"Are you unaware of the raging demonstrations in our streets, in front of our churches and synagogues, even spilling into these places of worship, and many of these riots turning defamatory and violent?" Boone wrote Dec. 6 for World Net Daily. "Have you not seen the awful similarity between what happened in Mumbai and what's happening right now in our cities?"

Boone does clarify by saying the homosexual "rights" demonstrations haven't reached the same level of violence as Mumbai (really?), but he goes on to proselytize that "hate is hate, no matter where it erupts."

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VIEWPOINT

Mighty Real

On the 20th anniversary of his death, let us hold Sylvester up with pride and continue to uncover the lessons he offers

By CRAIG WASHINGTON

IN THE FALL OF 1978, I WAS ON THE CUSP OF accepting the butt naked truth of my sexual orientation. My mother was cueing me to "come out" — not to disclose new information or confirm what was not definitive, but rather to have the family articulate the fact we all had so artfully dodged.

Though I grew up in the New York City, the same city as Greenwich Village, we actually lived in Cambria Heights, Queens. I dared not steel away to freedom downtown as I dreaded even the slightest possibility of being caught being myself by a neighbor or relative.

Meanwhile, disco music ruled the era, infusing the American imagination with pulsating beats and lyrics signifying sensuality, sexual freedom, and black, Latino, and queer subtexts. Never before or since did pop culture so fully embrace the subversive elements it had once so rigidly suppressed.

For the first time in my 18 years, I saw evidence that my own scarlet letter might at least be tolerated if not welcomed. But I still was not ready to accept the unmistakable signs the universe was sending me.

IT WAS DURING THIS STAR-KISSED SEASON THAT I first encountered the fabulous Sylvester. It was a Friday night, and I was trying to watch "Dance Fever," one of the hottest disco TV shows, but both sound and picture were distorted on our ailing set. A high-pitched wail sliced through the buzz as a full-figured silhouette within a flood of berry colored snow.

"Who's that Craig? She sound good," my mother asked from upstairs.

"Don't know," I responded, tilting my head to catch a familiar feature through the purpled haze.

Just as I yelled, "I think it's Aretha," both image and voice sharpened. "I feel real, when you touch me," she said, as she materialized into an Other, someone unlike any I had ever witnessed.

"Naw, uh no," I stammered. "It's not Aretha."

It was another queen. Like the soul legend, he too was at the vanguard of a cultural revolution. Disco. And the community that beckoned my inevitable entry would soon crown him as the genre's queen, despite Donna Summer's reign.

MY SKIN CRACKLED AS I WATCHED HIM SING AND twirl, exalting the very "damaged good" I had stuffed deep down inside, where I prayed no one could see. How could he be so free with it? How could he Be?

I wanted to change the channel before my mother came downstairs and saw her son's reflection. But I was too transfixed. The sheer black aesthetic of that falsetto voice slung high up over his head in gospel abandon, sounding more like Patti Labelle than Smokey Robinson. Yet he was not unfamiliar.

Not only was he one of us, unmistakably black in expression and appearance, he and I were of the same scorned tribe. What made him alien to me, unbearable to watch yet impossible not to, was his defiance. He was not the sissy joke in the beauty parlor scene, he was the Sissy, and the joke was on all discomforted by this insubordination.

Within a year of that holy night, I began celebrating my salvation on dance floors with that voice ringing above me. At an upper west side Manhattan club known as 96 West, I recognized him at the bar.

I rehearsed my greeting before daring to approach, anticipating a swift dismissal. I braced myself, and shared my admiration, addressing him as "Mr. Sylvester."

"Oh why thank you, thank you very much," he responded with a subdued grace I will never forget.

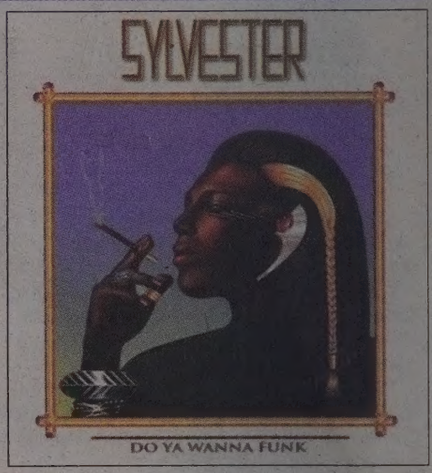
I was no longer spectator, watching the spectacle whose performance was more real than my own real life masquerade. The year before, I could only witness through a television screen from a distance as vast as that between deadening silence and the spoken word that sparks life. Now I could touch him, speak to him.

In order to step into that reality, I had to dare walk off the stage to which I thought I was tethered.

IN THE WINTER YEARS THAT ENSUED, AIDS STOLE the sunlight from our heyday, and plucked away many of the angels I looked to as north stars. By 1988, it had been three years since my first symptoms had appeared. I knew that our Sylvester had been stricken, not from rumors as with other celebrities, but rather by his own disclosure.

Wheelchair bound, he appeared in the San Francisco Gay Parade looking jubilant but frail as he was wheeled in front of the People With AIDS banner. In a Jet Magazine interview, he stated, "I would like to think that by going public with this, I can give other people the courage to face it."

Of all these reports, I remember most the Village Voice article in which he revealed that he



wanted a boyfriend but doubted if anyone would desire him "walking around looking strange." The personal dimensions of that small reflection creased my heart.

Even in his last days, Sylvester walked in the light. At that time, I was still making excuses to explain away my swollen lymph nodes to men who were AIDS activists and artists. I heard the soft tap of my teardrops hitting the paper as I realized that in sickness he was still teaching me to be free.

Sylvester died on December 16, 1988. When I think of him, I think of a diva who as Thulani Davis once wrote about Aretha, "let her nappy edges show" and thus "could be trusted with ours."

He refused to be closeted or "butch up" as his record company once insisted. He did not use female pronouns to indicate a woman love interest in any of his original songs. When he was diagnosed with AIDS, he did not hide.

Ironically, by the shared standards of both dominant and black gay male culture, Sylvester would be judged as an inappropriate model for us because he was overtly feminine and thus no a "real man."

FOR BLACK PEOPLE, PARTICULARLY BLACK GAY MEN long burdened by anxieties about masculinit and male performance, Sylvester offers an invaluable model. Whether in full drag or a white tuxedo, soaring in falsetto or crooning in baritone, prancing onstage or being wheeled in his last parade, Sylvester maintained his integrity.

He was true to himself at every stage of his public life, choosing not to participate in the lie black people enforce upon ourselves about who we are and who are not. He may have lost many things, but never himself.

In the biopic "Milk," Sylvester appears all t briefly as the unnamed performer who greets Harvey Milk, not as the renowned star who by that time was more popular than Milk himself.

On the 20th anniversary of his passing, let u hold Sylvester up high with pride, ensure his rightful place in history, and continue to uncov the lessons he offers for our now.

Atlanta writer and activist Craig Washingt can be reached at www.craigwerks.com.

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IFS-A156710 Ed. 10/2008

GAY MLK EVENTS

Thursday, Jan. 15

MLK Kick-off party
10 p.m. at Super 8 Hotel-Downtown
111 Cone St., 404-246-9000
www.wassupnatl.com

Friday, Jan. 16

Winston Johnson @ YouthPride
Reception at 6:30 p.m., program at 7:30 p.m.
YouthPride, 1017 Edgewood Ave.
404-521-9711, www.youthpride.org

Trade Friday
10 p.m. at Haze @ Club Trademark
91 Broad St., www.myspace.com/haze_trademark

Traxx Girls kick-off party
10 p.m. at Club Miami
3011 Buford Highway, 404-929-9991
www.traxxgirls.com

Man-Up Friday
10 p.m. at Moya Lounge
1371 Clairmont Road, Decatur
www.wassupnatl.com

Saturday, Jan. 17

East Coast Pro Classic Women's Basketball Tournament
10 a.m.-7 p.m. at Buchannan High School
2595 Beaver Ruin Road, www.traxxgirls.com

'Experience the Dream' party
10 p.m. at Marriott downtown
160 Spring St., www.myspace.com/atlfal_fan

'The Movement' party
10 p.m. at Traxx
1287 Columbia Dr., www.traxxatlanta.com

Magnum Saturday ft. NeNe Leakes
10 p.m. at Club 708
708 Spring St., www.wassupnatl.com

Traxx Girls
10 p.m. at Vino Libro
933 Garrett St., www.traxxgirls.com

Sunday, Jan. 18

East Coast Pro Classic
Women's Basketball Tournament
10 a.m.-7 p.m.
Buchannan High School, 2595 Beaver Ruin Road
www.traxxgirls.com

Brown Sugar Vibe Brunch
Noon at Sugar Hill @ Underground
50 Upper Alabama Road
www.myspace.com/atlfal_fan

Grown & Sexy party
6 p.m. at Django
495 Peachtree St.
www.wassupnatl.com

Winter Meltdown ft. Sheree Whitfield
8 p.m. at Club Europe
4001 Presidential Parkway
www.xtremeentertainment.moonfruit.com

My Girl Gotta Girlfriend party ft. Miss Sophia
8 p.m. at Club Miami, 3011 Buford Highway
www.traxxgirls.com

Monday, Jan. 19

Atlanta Black LGBT Coalition protest of Rick Warren
9 a.m. near the King Center, exact location TBD
blog.glbtatl.org/

Bayard Rustin/Audre Lorde Community Breakfast
10 a.m. at 139 Ralph McGill Blvd.

MLK March
1 p.m., Gay contingency to meet at the corner of Peachtree & Ellis streets

Celebrating a KING and his queen

Coretta Scott King reflection, Rick Warren protest part of gay MLK activities

By RYAN LEE
rlee@sovo.com

Three months after starting a rather glamorous job at the Atlanta airport in 1968, Winston Johnson found himself at the center of history, surrounded by celebrities and dignitaries during one of our nation's darkest hours.

Johnson, who grew up in rural Florida and almost ended his life during college because he was gay, moved to Atlanta with his lifelong partner, Leon Allen, in 1967. Shortly after arriving, Johnson was hired by an airline to cater to its high-end travelers, taxiing them from their planes to the airline's celebrity lounge.

On April 5, 1968, Johnson was assigned to drive for Abigail McCarthy, whose husband, U.S. Sen. Eugene McCarthy (D-Minn.), was running for president that year. Knowing that Abigail McCarthy was enduring a multi-hour layover, Johnson informed her that the plane carrying the body of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., who was assassinated in Memphis the day before, was about to arrive at the Atlanta airport.

McCarthy told Johnson that she and King's wife, Coretta Scott King, were close friends and asked him to drive her to the plane. As her husband's body and bronze casket were being unloaded from an airplane chartered by Robert Kennedy, Coretta Scott King embraced Abigail McCarthy and invited her to a gathering at the King home.

McCarthy asked Johnson if it was OK for him to drive her outside the airport, and soon, the two of them were in Dr. King's living room with the likes of Harry Belafonte and other celebrities, activists and politicians.

"People were just in shock," Johnson, 67, recalled. "It was just so strange to me. Here was this worldwide event, and somehow I kind of ended up in the middle of it."

Johnson recreates the moment he met Coretta Scott King, and the subsequent decades-long friendship that evolved between the two of them, during an MLK celebration at YouthPride Jan. 16.

Johnson will take part in a discussion with Dave Hayward of the gay Atlanta history project Touching Up Our Roots, who believes Johnson's historic friendship with Mrs. King needs to be shared with gay youth.

'I'LL BE THERE'

As Coretta Scott King grew into her own role as an activist and public speaker, Johnson often served as her airport driver. The two became close friends.

"We hit it off immediately and really liked each other," said Johnson, who began volunteering to help Coretta Scott King create the King Center in honor of her late husband.

Johnson and his partner were also involved in civil rights efforts, but the two closeted men were wary of participating in gay rights politics. Johnson's struggles with his sexual orientation once brought him seconds from racing his car off a Florida road, and almost cost him his job at the airport when a supervisor asked him if he was a homosexual.

The quiet, closeted life the couple had carved out was dramatically disrupted in 1986, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Bowers v. Hardwick — a case that arose from Atlanta — that it was within a state's right to arrest gay people who violated the state's sodomy law by engaging in oral or anal sex.

"It just blew us out of the water," Johnson said. "You can imagine, back then, how scary that was."

Johnson and Allen got in touch with gay activists at the Human Rights Campaign and soon became a part of the movement. Johnson thought to call Coretta Scott King and explain to her the injustice of the Bowers v. Hardwick decision, but first he would have to come out to her after almost 20 years of friendship.

Atlanta resident **Winston Johnson** befriended the late **Coretta Scott King**, and helped her become active in the gay rights movement. (Photo courtesy of Johnson)

"I said, 'There's something that we should've talked about years ago, but we just haven't,'" Johnson recalled. "She responded really beautifully, and said, 'I can see that you and Leon loved each other.'

"I said, 'I'm telling you this because I want you to do something,'" Johnson added. "She said, 'You just tell me where and when, and I'll be there.'"

That fall, MLK's widow made her first public comments in support of gay rights, an issue she continued to champion until her death in 2006.

As he prepares to address YouthPride, Johnson reflects on messages he wishes he had heard as a young gay person struggling with his identity.

"That I was OK, that I was OK just like I was," said Johnson, who has also learned the value of coming out. "If you know someone loves you, they're still going to love you. That would've been wonderful, and that's the main thing I'll be telling those kids at YouthPride."

WARREN PROTEST

One message to gay youth that Johnson does not look forward to during MLK weekend is the appearance of Rev. Rick Warren at King's Ebenezer Baptist Church on Jan. 19, a day before Warren delivers the invocation at President-elect Barack Obama's inauguration.

Warren has been widely criticized by gay rights activists for supporting bans on same-sex marriage, and suggesting that legalization of same-sex unions might lead to incestuous or polygamous marriages.

"Knowing his anti-gay views and seeing him next to the U.S. president, that would've been pretty bad for me to take at 15," Johnson said.

The Atlanta Black LGBT Coalition is leading a protest of Warren's appearance at Ebenezer at 9 a.m. on Jan. 19.

"We are going to be present and taking a stand to assert our humanity," said Craig Washington, one of the founding members of the Black LGBT Coalition, which is working with Georgia Equality, GLBT ATL and Spark to coordinate the protest.

"In a pointed way, we're challenging the homophobia and patriarchy that Warren's stances perpetuate," Washington said. "It's unfortunate, and it's a backpedaling of progress when we elevate someone as bigoted as Rick Warren to serve in a prominent role in the inauguration. It contradicts the promise, quite frankly. It contradicts the promise that Obama has symbolized."

The exact location of the Jan. 19 protest has not been determined, but it will likely take place in the vicinity of the King Center, which is the protest's primary target, Washington said.

After the protest, organizers host the annual Bayard Rustin/Audre Lorde Community Breakfast at 139 Ralph McGill Blvd., which has become a staple for gay activists and allies during MLK weekend.

The organizing committee for the annual MLK march includes the Bayard Rustin/Audre Lorde breakfast on its official schedule of events, and is continuing its tradition of inviting gay and transgender speakers to the mainstream MLK march. This year's gay speaker is Michael Brewer, a young activist who worked to decrease homophobia at his school, Morehouse College.

"The MLK march itself has always been, as long as I've been in Atlanta, one of the most welcoming events," Washington said. "The organizing committee has been so inclusive of its LGBT members and our presence."

Following the breakfast, a gay contingency will meet at the corner of Peachtree and Ellis streets to join in the annual city-wide MLK march, then listen to Brewer along with other speakers.

Let freedom dance

Gay, lesbian promoters plan big parties for MLK weekend

By RYAN LEE
rlee@sovo.com

Having conquered the airwaves to become America's favorite guilty pleasure, the stars of "The Real Housewives of Atlanta" continue their takeover of gay Atlanta during Martin Luther King Jr. weekend.

Sheree Whitfield takes time out of her ongoing effort to gain a seven-figure divorce settlement to host the Lion's Den's "Winter Meltdown" party at Club Europe Jan. 18.

"They're planning to do some limited taping of the show for the next season," says Gregory Allen, head of Xtreme Entertainment, the group behind the Lion's Den.

Prior to the Atlanta edition of "The Real Housewives" airing, Whitfield attended one of the Lion's Den's parties during Labor Day Weekend, where she served as a judge during the Xtreme Catwalk fashion show.

"We've built a relationship with her from there," says Allen, who hopes that Whitfield will bring her yet-to-be-released fashion line to future Lion's Den fashion shows.

Several of the most colorful stars of "The Real Housewives of Atlanta" are becoming fixtures of the city's gay nightlife scene. In addition to Whitfield frequenting Lion's Den parties, Kim Zolciak has recently fallen in love with Blake's on the Park, and NeNe Leakes is making frequent appearances at the Buckhead gay club Vita.

Leakes drops in at Club 708 during MLK weekend for a Jan. 17 party hosted by WassupNATL. WassupNATL has one of the busiest party schedules for MLK weekend, with six nightlife events at six different clubs from Jan. 15-19.

Behind Labor Day weekend, MLK is typically the second-biggest party weekend for black gay Atlanta. This year's celebration may be more low-key than past years, as many out-of-towners are expected to head to Washington D.C. for Barack Obama's inauguration instead of making the traditional trip to Atlanta.

"Those of us who are event organizers in Atlanta, we were initially concerned about how we would be impacted [by the inauguration]," Allen says. "We're being very conservative in terms of what we would typically do for this weekend because we really don't know what the impact will be. Nonetheless, I feel pretty good about it that people are going to be in Atlanta."

PACKED SCHEDULE

TRAXX Atlanta offers a fully loaded schedule for gay men during MLK weekend, most notably its "The Movement" party on Jan. 17 that is expected to draw thousands of revelers.

The ladies behind Traxx Girls also provide a full schedule of parties, beginning with a kickoff event at Club Miami on Jan. 16 that is hosted by supermodel Tomika Skanes and reality TV star Frankie Lons, better known as the mother of R&B superstar Keyshia Coles.

Traxx Girls hosts a Saturday night party at Vino Libro Jan. 17 featuring acclaimed DJ Mary Mac, followed by an after-party at Traxx hosted by hip-hop artist and actress Eve. On Jan. 18, Traxx Girls hosts a sports-themed house ball, hosted by Legendary Mother Jamie Balenciaga, at the Ice Lounge downtown.

Following the ball, the Traxx Girls close out their MLK weekend with a "My Girlfriend Gotta Girlfriend" party hosted by V-103's Miss Sophia at Club Miami. Traxx Girls also offers daytime entertainment and activities throughout MLK weekend, including a women's basketball tournament at Buchanan High School in Norcross Jan. 17 and Jan. 18.

Luxhery Entertainment also caters to lesbians throughout MLK weekend, beginning with a Jan. 17 party at the Marriott downtown. The next day, Luxhery hosts the "Brown Sugar Vibe Brunch," a spoken-word event at Sugar Hill in Underground Atlanta.

NeNe Leakes (above) and **Sheree Whitfield** of 'The Real Housewives of Atlanta' will appear at separate gay parties during MLK weekend. (Photos courtesy Bravo)

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Richardson withdrawal renews push for gay Cabinet member

Gay man to serve on senior White House staff

By CHRIS JOHNSON

New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson's decision to withdraw as President-elect Barack Obama's nominee for commerce secretary prompted activist groups to ask Obama to name an openly gay official to the post.

The vacancy, announced earlier this week, gives Obama an opportunity to nominate a gay person to his Cabinet, something that transition officials have heavily hinted would happen in private meetings with gay rights activists. Some of those activists publicly expressed their disappointment and frustration when Obama failed to include a gay nominee after making his final Cabinet picks.

Richardson, who initially competed against Obama for the Democratic presidential nomination but later endorsed him, withdrew as the commerce secretary nominee amidst a federal investigation into how his political donors landed a transportation contract in New Mexico.

Joe Solmonese, president of the Human Rights Campaign, said in a statement Monday that Richardson's withdrawal means Obama "is presented with yet another opportunity to make good on his promise of equality for all LGBT people."

Denis Dison, spokesperson for the Gay & Lesbian Victory Fund, said his organization and the Presidential Appointments Project continue to encourage Obama to nominate an openly gay person for his Cabinet and that the new vacancy "presents another opportunity for them to look at an LGBT applicant."

Dison said Fred Hochberg, a gay man who previously was under consideration to head the Small Business Administration, is "out there today as the best chance the LGBT community" has for a nominee as commerce secretary.

Hochberg serves on the Obama transition team and declined to comment for this article. He served as deputy and acting administrator of the SBA under President Clinton and until recently was the dean of Milano, the New School for Management & Urban Policy in New York.

A grassroots effort has emerged to encourage Obama to select Hochberg as commerce secretary. Paul Sousa, 21, a student at Northeastern University in Boston, established the online organization Equal Rep, which encourages those who want to see a gay person in Obama's Cabinet to call or e-mail the transition team every day until a decision has been made for the commerce secretary nomination, or until Jan. 19, the eve of Inauguration Day.

"We're not pushing his name just because he's gay," Sousa said. "We're pushing his name because he's highly qualified and the fact that he's openly gay is kind of icing on the cake there."

The Obama transition team declined to comment this week on possible appointments for commerce secretary.

Gay activists are calling on President-elect **Barack Obama** (left) to nominate an openly gay official as commerce secretary following New Mexico Gov. **Bill Richardson**'s decision to withdraw from consideration. (Photo by Pablo Martinez Monsivais/AP)

GAY STAFF APPOINTEE

In a separate development, Obama on Monday announced that an openly gay man would serve on his staff as director of the White House Office of Management & Administration.

Brad Kiley, the appointee, is director of operations for the Obama transition team and an official for the Center for American Progress think tank.

The head of the White House Office of Management & Administration is charged with overseeing the operations of the White House in matters such as salaries, office space and budgeting. It is not a Cabinet-level position.

Kiley served as deputy assistant to the president for management and administration under President Clinton, according to the Center for American Progress web site.

He also was director of finance and administration for the 1996 Democratic National Convention and has held leadership positions at NARAL, a pro-choice organization, and the International AIDS Trust, the web site says.

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Lesbian drama

ATL party for season premiere of 'The L Word' expects huge crowd

By DYANA BAGBY
dbagby@sovo.com

The sixth and final season of 'The L Word' kicks off with a Jan. 15 Atlanta viewing of the season opener. (Photo courtesy Showtime)

CLOSE TO 800 LESBIANS — AS WELL AS A few gay men and transgender people — are expected to pack the Wild Mustang/Jungle on Jan. 15 for the Atlanta final season premiere of "The L Word."

The popular Showtime series that follows a group of Los Angeles lesbians as they maneuver through rocky relationships, baby mama drama and, well, some very sexy hookups has garnered a faithful following, especially in Atlanta.

"This year, we're opening the doors at 4 p.m. so people can get in early," says Brad Williams, owner of the Wild Mustang/Jungle.

"We usually hit capacity," he says. "In the past, we've had people lined up around the block waiting to get in an hour before the party.

"My life has been threatened by women afraid they weren't going to get in, so we are suggesting people arrive early," he laughs.

DOORS OFFICIALLY OPEN AT 7 P.M. WITH THE screening set to start at 8 p.m. After the viewing, there will be an after party featuring DJ Vicki Powell.

In the past, cast members such as Pam Grier as well as creator Ilene Chaiken have visited Atlanta to partake in the preview parties. This year, however, no cast members will join in on the fun here or in the other 25 cities holding "L Word" premiere parties.

"No cast members are going to any of the events this year, unfortunately," said Rachel Balick, spokersperson for the Human Rights Campaign. HRC is a sponsor of the event.

"We've been a partner with Showtime for all six seasons, and 'The L Word' basically spreads awareness of LGBT life — plus it's good entertainment," Balick says. "These events are a chance to unite the community and are wildly popular. We're happy to be partners and give something back."

The party also serves as a fundraiser for HRC, and the gay rights organization asks for a $10 suggested donation.

THE FINAL SEASON BEGINS WITH A BANG as Jenny (Mia Kirshner), the character everyone loves to hate, is found dead and all her friends are suspects. For Kate Bishop, an Atlanta lesbian who watched the show since the first season, there is no love lost with Jenny gone.

Final season premiere of 'The L Word'
Jan. 15; doors open at 4 p.m.
The Wild Mustang/Jungle
2115 Faulkner Road
www.hrc.org/lword
http://www.myspace.com/jungle_bradwilliams

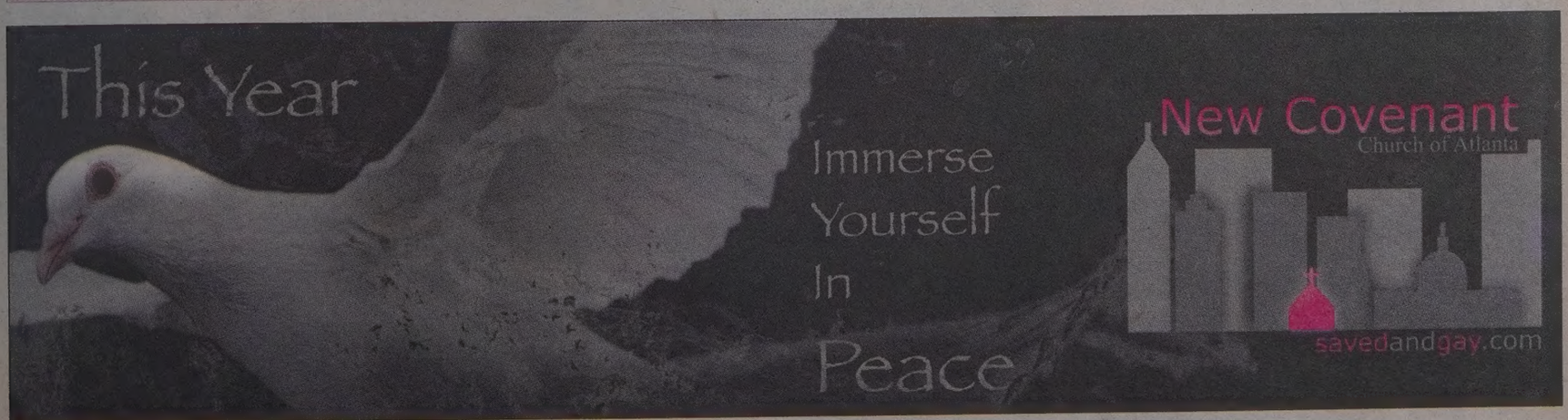
"I despised her character the most, so her absence will not be noticed," Bishop says.

And while the lesbian lives played out on "The L Word" — with their glamorous jobs, great hair and trendy outfits — rarely serve as insight into what life is like for real lesbians, the show broke ground by making lesbians the main characters who do deal with real-life issues.

"I am glad that this is the last season of 'The L Word,'" Bishop says. "I think the writing has not been very good ever since Season 2. It never really encompassed a realistic angle towards the lesbian community. The show has almost become campy.

"[But] I like that the show included a lot of strong actors/actresses who clearly are very supportive of the gay community."

Katherine Moennig (left) and **Mia Kirshner** in the final season of 'The L Word.' (Photo courtesy Showtime)



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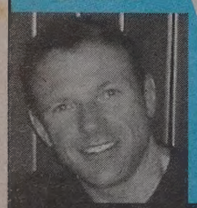

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The Tramp is a lady

Bawdy drag star Lady Bunny takes on the role of a preacher's wife

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WHEN LADY BUNNY JOINS THE CAST OF "VERANDA 2" next week, it's a return home to the South for the bawdy drag goddess. Known for her high blonde hair and her naughty routines, Bunny takes over the role of Charity Divine in the second of the "Veranda" trilogy of comedies from gay writers John Gibson and Anthony Morris.

Charity is a preacher's wife who has recently adopted a baby overseas and thinks she is actually pregnant. The role is regularly played by local drag personality Bubba D. Licious in this production. Charity's husband is minister to the show's main character, who is running for Christian of the Wear while she plans her son's gay wedding. The show, written several years ago, gets new life in the current climate of controversy surrounding gay marriage.

Lady Bunny arrived in town on Jan. 8 and is rehearsing for a week before making her debut in the role.

BUNNY GREW UP IN CHATTANOOGA AND MOVED to Atlanta in 1982, where she befriended DJ and music promoter Larry Tee. While here, she was roommates with RuPaul.

"I remember Atlanta and the club scene here was so much fun," she says.

It was around that time that Lady Bunny began to find her calling. She found some acting roles but soon decided to take her career into her own hands, adopting her drag persona.

"I was a sissy who had been pretending to be straight all my life," she says. With the wig on, Lady Bunny was born. "I love it — you can be your own director, your own choreographer, your own star."

When she moved to New York City, she was instrumental in starting Wigstock, one of the world's biggest drag celebrations. The project started off very modestly with a group of friends, but grew into a major New York happening. In 1995, the feature-length documentary "Wigstock: The Movie" chronicled the rise of the event and sent Lady Bunny's star rising higher. Wigstock hasn't been held since 2005, but this year marks the 25th anniversary.

EVEN BY HER OWN TERMS, LADY BUNNY HAD A busy 2008. Besides her various nightclub acts, her snippy fashion contributions to "Star" magazine and her popular website/blog, she was seen in the film "Another Gay Sequel" and was one of the co-hosts for the GayVNs, the Oscars of gay porn.

She and RuPaul were reunited on the set of "Another Gay Sequel" and remembered what made them friends originally.

"We both have a sick sense of humor," Lady Bunny says.

Ironically, Lady Bunny shared the stage with Bubba D. Licious back in 2004 at the Divas Rock Atlanta event featuring Deborah Gibson, Deborah Cox and Martha Washington.

"We hit it off like the Southern queens that we are," Lady Bunny laughs. "We spent time backstage complaining about how sore our feet were."

The performer says the character of Charity, which she and Bubba share, will suit her.

"I like the fact that she is colorful and has crazy costumes and gets to chew the scenery," she says. "I am very excited about it. What I love about doing 'Veranda 2' is that my parents can come see it."

Much of her material is not suitable for all audiences, but this show, as well as its geographical convenience, make her family's attendance appropriate, she says.

While in Atlanta, Lady Bunny jokes that she wants to go to Swinging Richards, but her top priority is getting the character and the show down. She also plans to have dinner with Charlie Brown.

"She got in touch with me via MySpace, and we are going to meet up. She is drag royalty, " Bunny says, noting that it would be even better to get old-school legend Lily White there as well.

Former Atlanta resident and New York drag phenom **Lady Bunny** steps into the role of the preacher's wife for a limited time in the ongoing play 'Veranda 2.' (Photo by David Shankbone/AP)

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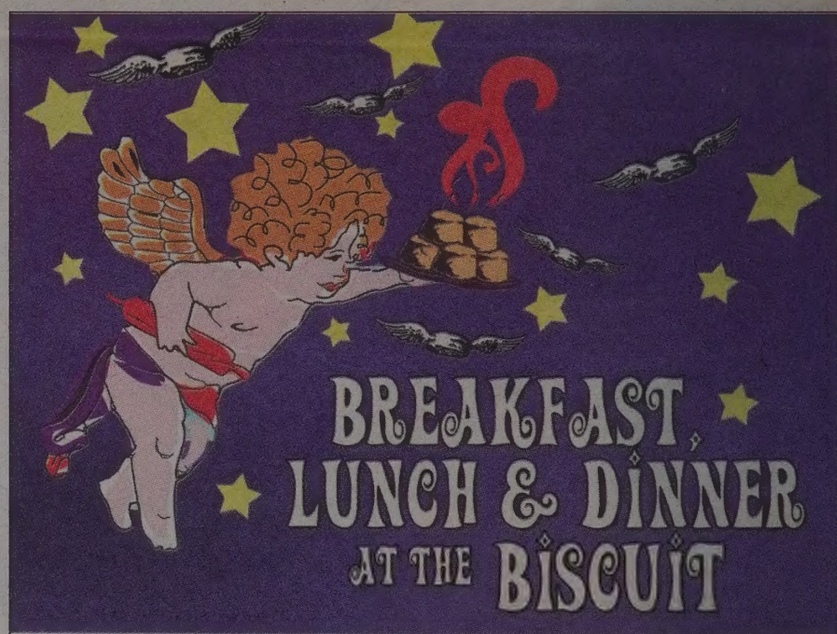

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Paying tribute to the 'queen of Atlanta'

John Speaks remembered by friends, loved ones at Outwrite

By DYANA BAGBY
dbagby@sovo.com

Dozens of people packed Outwrite Bookstore & Coffeehouse Aut. 31 to pay tribute to John Speaks, the store's most "loyal customer" as well as a friend to numerous people in Atlanta's LGBT community who called him the "Queen of Atlanta."

Speaks, 64, died Aug. 27 of a heart attack. A graveside service was held earlier Aug. 31 at Greenwood Cemetery.

"He was here all the time," said Outwrite owner Philip Rafshoon. "He was one of our most loyal customers ever. He was one of the most interesting persons I've ever met. He was a leader because he knew how to mentor.

"He knew everything about everyone — and some days we absolutely hated him for it," Rafshoon said to laughter, "but most days we absolutely loved him. He was a friend."

Nearly 20 people shared memories of Speaks, most noting his extensive travels and extensive knowledge on just about any topic — from literature to art, politics, various cultures and religions and, yes, local gossip.

"What a hard week it's been — we've lost the lion in the Senate and now the queen of Atlanta," said friend Jess Bowling. "I loved John very much. He was magical."

Franklin Abbott, a local writer and poet, knew Speaks for 25 years and noted his friend traveled to every continent, including Antarctica.

"We worked together with the Pro-Feminist Men's Movement and organized conferences. I knew John when he was married and I knew him when he came out. He had more energy than most teenagers," Abbott said. "He was interested in everyone and everything ... and he had a way of extracting secrets from everyone."

Speaks was married to his wife, Linda, for 30 years, before she died in 1997.

Never a stranger

Umayr Hassan, outreach coordinator for Trikone, the South Asian LGBT group in Atlanta, said he knew Speaks only for about eight months but in that time, through their conversations at Outwrite and at Trikone socials, he knew Speaks was a special man.

"He was culturally aware and sensitive and would ask penetrating questions," said Hassan, who is from Pakistan. "He had a constant curiosity."

Deepali Gokhale, who met Speaks nine years ago at Hoedowns, learned about Speaks' travels to South Asia where he worked in textiles. He told her he missed the South Asian culture and she invited him to Trikone social events, which he regularly attended for nearly a decade.

"He was brilliantly intelligent but so modest ... and charming all at the same time," she said. "You never had a boring conversation with John Speaks. He really was radical because he was one of the most loving persons on earth — and love itself is radical."

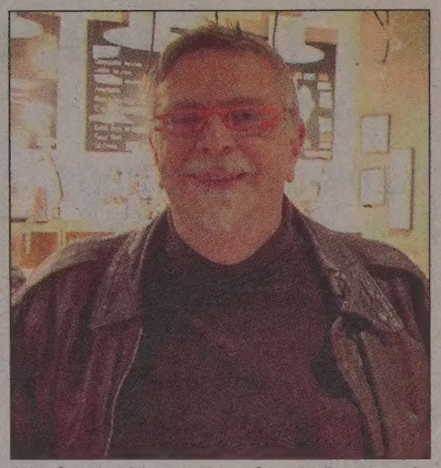
Others said it would be hard coming to Outwrite and not seeing Speaks in the store. Many told of how he was one of the first people they met when they moved to Atlanta and how he helped guide them in finding gay organizations and other LGBT peers.

"Is there anyone more aptly named than John Speaks? The child could talk," said Craig Washington, a longtime AIDS activist.

"I met him here and he taught me many lessons — being present in the moment; he was so engaging, such a courageous thinker, lover, doer. And he was always pushing us in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer community. He really believed in freedom," Washington added, breaking down in tears.

Gus Kaufman, who helped found Men Stopping Violence with the help of Speaks, said, "There was no world he felt a stranger to."

One of the final speakers was Speaks' young grandson, who said, "He always loved me and was always nice to me. I loved him a lot and he loved me a lot, too."



John Speaks, 64, a regular at Outwrite Bookstore & Coffeehouse, died Aug. 27. (File photo)

According to a family-placed death notice, Speaks taught English as a Second Language at Georgia Perimeter College. His survivors include sons John and Jacob Speaks; his partner, Corey Green; parents Rev. John T. and Martha Speaks; sister Henrietta Speaks, daughters-in-law Susan Shirley and Jennifer Hamilton; and grandchildren Morgan Russell and John Speaks IV.

In lieu of flowers, Speaks' family asks friends and loved ones to make contributions to the progressive cause of their choosing.

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N.Y. congressional race defies expectations

Republican backs same-sex marriage, Democrat opposes it

By CHRIS JOHNSON

Gay Republicans are rallying behind a New York GOP candidate who favors same-sex marriage in her bid for the U.S. House against a Democratic contender who opposes marriage rights for gays.

Diedre "Dede" Scozzafava, a Republican New York state Assembly member, is seeking to represent her state's 23rd congressional district. A member of the Assembly since 1999, Scozzafava voted in 2007 and again earlier this year in favor of bills to legalize same-sex marriage in New York.

She's facing off against Democrat Bill Owens, a Plattsburgh, N.Y., attorney, who last month said in a radio interview that he doesn't support same-sex marriage. Doug Hoffman, a Lake Placid accountant, is running on the ticket for New York's Conservative Party.

The seat will become vacant after the U.S. Senate confirms Rep. John McHugh (R-N.Y.) as Army secretary. Lawmakers are expected to confirm McHugh to the position shortly after they return from the August recess.

McHugh must resign his congressional seat before New York Gov. David Paterson (D) can call for a special election, but some media outlets have speculated that the vote would take place on Election Day in November.

Charles Moran, a Log Cabin spokesperson, said Scozzafava represents the views of New York's 23rd congressional district because "she fiscally is fairly conservative, but ... on the social issues she's very much mainstream in what the district believes in and also what America believes in with marriage equality."

"We love Dede," he said. "This is a district where Dede has represented and lived for many years and this is just another example of Republicans continuing to push for an inclusive message."

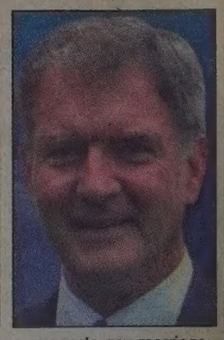
Scozzafava, whose campaign didn't respond to a request for comment, was quoted in a July 24 article in the Politico voicing support for same-sex marriage.

"I'm pro-choice, and I also support gay marriage," she said. "The leadership might not like that — but the people that I'm closest to have voted for me, know me, and they're very supportive."

But one group opposed to same-sex marriage is infuriated over Scozzafava's position. Brian Brown, executive director of the National Organization for Marriage, said his organization contacted New York Republican officials and asked them to remove Scozzafava as their nominee in the race.

"It is a slap in the face to the voters of this district," he said. "This is a socially conservative district and we hope that the nomination will be removed and someone else will be put in her place because this is not a good move for the Republican Party by any stretch."

Scozzafava's marriage position contrasts with that of her Democratic opponent. Owens, the Democratic contender for the House seat, told North County Public Radio on Aug. 12 that he doesn't support marriage rights for same-sex couples.



Republican **Dede Scozzafava** supports gay marriage. Democrat **Bill Owens** is opposed. (Campaign photos)

"People who are seeking civil unions should have that option," Owens said. "However, I think that the word 'marriage' has some very important religious connotations and I would not be in support of a bill that addressed it in that fashion. But I certainly fully support civil rights for everyone in every area."

The National Stonewall Democrats didn't respond to a request for comment on Owens' marriage stance.

Texas liquor board fires 3 over raid on gay bar

FORT WORTH, Texas (AP) — Texas' liquor board fired two agents and a supervisor, disciplined two other supervisors and changed several policies in the wake of a raid at a gay bar that left a customer seriously injured and led to protests, officials announced last week.

The Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission said agent Christopher Aller and agent trainee Jason Chapman, who participated in the June 28 raid at the Rainbow Lounge, were fired Friday. Their supervisor, Sgt. Terry Parsons, was not at the Fort Worth bar that night but also was fired, effective Sept. 2.

Aller and Chapman failed to report that they used force when arresting the customer or that he was seriously injured, according to a report on the agency's investigation. They also were accused of participating in the raid without their supervisor's approval, disrupting the business during the raid and wearing improper attire, the report says.

Parsons failed to ensure that the agents submitted a report on using force during the arrest, did not take appropriate action after learning they didn't wear proper attire and did not notify supervisors that multiple arrests had been made that night, the report says.

The commission said Parsons' direct supervisor, Lt. Gene Anderson, would be suspended without pay for three days and be on probation for six months, and Capt. Robert Cloud, who oversees the Dallas and Fort Worth TABC offices, has received a written reprimand. Both inadequately monitored new agents' training and inadequately supervised Fort Worth employees and their activities, the agency said.

Gay activists demanded answers after police in Fort Worth, Texas, arrested seven gay bar customers for public intoxication. (Photo courtesy of Tamme Nash/Dallas Voice)

IN BRIEF *Find the latest in LGBT news across the nation @* SOVO.COM

Same-sex marriages begin in Vt.

DUXBURY, Vt. (AP) — After 17 years together, Bill Slimback and Bob Sullivan couldn't wait another minute to get married. So they didn't.

With Vermont's new law allowing same-sex marriage only a minute old, they tied the knot in a midnight ceremony at a rustic lodge, becoming one of the first couples to legally wed under a law that took effect at midnight Sept. 1..

"It feels wonderful," said Slimback, 38, an out-of-work Teamster who is taking Sullivan's last name as his own. "It's a day I've been long waiting for, and a day I truly honestly thought would never come."

Slimback said he and Sullivan, 41, have long wanted to cement their relationship with a wedding, but since they couldn't legally marry in New York they chose to wed even before Vermont's gay marriage era officially dawned.

Vermont is one of five states that now allow same-sex couples to marry. Massachusetts, Connecticut and Iowa are the others. New Hampshire's law takes effect Jan. 1, 2010. A sixth state, Maine, has approved marriage for same-sex couples, but the measure faces a ballot challenge.

Vermont, which invented civil unions in 2000 after a same-sex couple challenged the inequality of state marriage statutes, was a mecca for gay couples who to that point had no way to officially recognize their relationships. In April, Vermont became the first state to legalize gay marriage through a legislative decree and not a court case.

DP law to face voters in Washington State

KOLYMPIA, Wash. — A referendum that could overturn Washington state's "everything but marriage" domestic partnership law has qualified for the November ballot.

The secretary of state's office said Monday that sponsors of Referendum 71 had 121,486 valid petition signatures — enough to put the newly expanded domestic partnership law to a public vote.

A secondary check of rejected signatures was not complete, so the number could increase.

The new law was supposed to take effect July 26 but was delayed until the signature count was complete. Now, it won't take effect unless it is approved in the Nov. 3 election.

The measure would expand existing domestic partnerships to give same-sex couples all the state-provided benefits provided to married opposite-sex couples.

Out-of-state couples flock to Iowa to wed

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Data show that same-sex couples are coming from other states to get married in Iowa.

An Iowa Supreme Court ruling in April legalized same-sex marriage in the state. The Des Moines Register reports that since the April ruling, state data show about 45 percent of Iowa's same-sex marriages were between out-of-state couples.

Between April 27 and July 27 there were 5,214 marriage certificates issued statewide. Of those, 676 were for same-sex couples. Gender was concealed on 339 marriage certificates.

Of the 676 same-sex couples, 312 couples weren't from Iowa. They were from neighboring states. Data show 57 couples were from Illinois, 38 were from Nebraska, 37 were from Missouri and 36 were from Minnesota.

City of Reno approves domestic partner benefits

RENO, Nev. (AP) — The city of Reno has become the latest local government entity in Nevada to extend benefits to the domestic partners of its employees.

The Reno City Council last week unanimously adopted a resolution that will extend health care benefits to domestic partners, whether gay or straight, who register with the Nevada secretary of state.

Council members do not think the action will cost the city much money, even though they have not yet received an analysis of potential costs.

Lee Rowland, attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union, expects the change to add dozens of people, not hundreds, to the city's health insurance program.

– Associated Press

BLACK GAY PRIDE EVENTS

Editors' note: In the Life Atlanta (ITLA) events held at Grand Atlanta Hyatt in Buckhead, 3300 Peachtree Road NE, 404-237-1234, unless otherwise noted.

THURSDAY, SEPT. 3

ITLA VIP Reception, invitation only. 7 p.m.

Traxx Girls Black Gay Pride opening party at My Sisters' Room. 10 p.m., 1271 Glenwood Ave., www.traxxgirls.com

DJs Fire and Deb spin eclectic grooves at The Studio at 10 p.m., $3 cover charge. 860 Hank Aaron Drive, email africanlove77@hotmail.com

Girls in the Night **Femme-nom-ennon** presents its annual trip to the Strip Club, an official event of Fever, featuring Lil Magic and the Girls. Doors open at 10 p.m. 241 Forsyth St., 404-604-8807, www.girlsinthenight.com

FRIDAY, SEPT. 4

ITLA Black Gay Pride Marketplace, 10 a.m.

In the Life Atlanta holds an **opening ceremony for Black Gay Pride**. Cash bar and door prizes. Includes performance by Anye Elite. 7-9 p.m. Followed by the **President's Pride Party** from 9 p.m.-2 a.m. with live DJ; cost is $10. Grand ballroom of the Grand Hyatt Atlanta in Buckhead, 3300 Peachtree Road NE, 404-237-1234, www.inthelifeatl.com

Charis Books & More celebrates Black Gay Pride and the Decatur Book Festival with a meet-and-greet with lesbian authors **Radclyffe, Fiona Zedde, Skyy, JM Redmann, Z Egloff, Kim Baldwin, VK Powell, D Jackson Leigh** and **Jane Vollbrecht**. 8-9:30 p.m. at 1189 Euclid Ave., www.chariscircle.org

Outwrite Bookstore & Coffeehouse hosts readings by authors **Mike Warren** and **Dwayne Vernon**, 7:30 p.m. at 991 Piedmont Ave. www.outwritebooks.com

ITLA Youth Tract presents **"Come Play Wit Us"** skate party at Metro Lanes & Games promotes HIV awareness. 8 p.m. to 11 p.m. 1950 Metropolitan Parkway, 404-765-9065

ITLA and **Traxx Atlanta** present the third annual **Fire & Desire Mini Ball**. Doors open at 9 p.m., ball starts at 10 p.m. Tables $30 in advance, $40 at the door. Grand ballroom of the Grand Hyatt Atlanta. www.inthelifeatl.com

ITLA **SpeakFire**, 11:59 p.m.

Traxx Girls and **Traxx Atlanta** with **Angie Stone**, 10 p.m. – 2:30 a.m. at 595 North, 595 North Ave. www.pureheatatlanta.com

Wassup N ATL presents the **City Gym Boys**, 10 p.m. – 3 a.m. Jungle 2115 Faulkner Road NE, www.wassupnatl.com

Traxx Girls presents **Angel Lola Luv** hosting the MC Battle with Rich Kids. 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. at Club Miami, 3011 Buford Highway, www.pureheatatlanta.com

Nene Leakes of "The Real Housewives of Atlanta" hosts **Wassup N ATL**'s Blingunderwear.com fashion show at Jungle, 2115 Faulkner Road. For a full schedule of Wassupnatl events throughout the weekend, visit www.atlantaprideformen.com

Girls in the Night and the women of Foreplay Fridays present the **Black Affair**, or Luna Negra 2009. 10 p.m., Vita in Buckhead, 2110 Peachtree St., www.girlsinthenight.com

SATURDAY, SEPT. 5

ITLA Black Pride Marketplace, 10 a.m.
ITLA Health Expo, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
ITLA Workshops, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.
ITLA Barber and Beauty Salon, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.
For full schedule, visit www.inthelifeatl.com

State of Black Gay America Summit, 11 a.m. – 4 p.m., Georgia Ballroom, second floor, Renaissance Atlanta Hotel Downtown, 590 West Peachtree St. NW, sbgasummit.org

ITLA Community Luncheon, 12 – 1:30 p.m.

ITLA Young Adult Mini Conference, 1 – 4 p.m.

ITLA Literary Café, 2:30 -5 p.m.
See story on Page 24.

ITLA **"See Us in the Life"** film festival, 2:30 – 6:30 p.m. Tickets are $10. Azalea Room of the Grand Hyatt Atlanta in Buckhead, 3300 Peachtree Road NE, 404-237-1234, www.inthelifeatl.com

Wassup N ATL pool party. 4-7 p.m., Grand Hyatt Atlanta in Buckhead, 3300 Peachtree Road NE, 404-237-1234, www.inthelifeatl.com

Outwrite Bookstore & Coffeehouse hosts readings by **G. Winston James** and **Sean Stewart Ruff**, 4 p.m.; **Nikki Rashan**, 5:30 p.m.; and **Rodney Lofton**, 7:30 p.m. 991 Piedmont Ave. www.outwritebooks.com

"An Evening with Stylemaker Dwight Eubanks," from "The Real Housewives of Atlanta," follows ITLA's "See Us in the Life" film fest. 7 p.m. at Grand Hyatt Buckhead.

ITLA **"Back Down Memory Lane"** Variety Show, 8:30 p.m.

Traxx Girls hosts **ATL Wet** with DJ Battle; hosted by Cassie and The Glen Twins. 3 - 8:30 p.m. at Primal.

Wassup N ATL presents **Liv Saturdays** 10 p.m.- 3 a.m. Vita, 2110 Peachtree Road NW, www.wassupnatl.com

Wassup N ATL presents **Magnum Saturdays** 10 p.m- 3 a.m. at Club 708, 708 Spring St., www.wassupnatl.com

(Photo via MySpace)
Lil' Kim

Traxx Girls Big Bang Event with **Lil Kim**, 11 p.m.-6 a.m., Freight Depot (outside Johnny Rockets at Underground Atlanta), and Lil Kim will appear at **Traxx** also, sometime between 11 p.m.-6 p.m., www.traxxatlatna.com

SUNDAY, SEPT. 6

ITLA Black Pride Marketplace, 10 a.m.
ITLA Workshops, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Candidate & Campaign training with Georgia Equality and the Gay & Lesbian Leadership Institute. 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. at Grand Hyatt Atlanta in Buckhead, 3300 Peachtree Road NE, 404- 523-3070, georgiaequality.org

ITLA Jazz Brunch, 11 a.m.

Youth SpeakOUT 2009 features students and alumni from historically black colleges and universities. 1 p.m. at Renaissance Atlanta Hotel mystory@pridetv.org

Brushstrokes hosts a DVD signing with director **Roger Omeus Jr.** and stars **Derrick Briggs** and **Eugene Turner** of **"Finding Me,"** a film about a young black gay man's struggle to find his place in the world. 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. at 1510 Piedmont Ave. www.brushstrokesatlanta.com

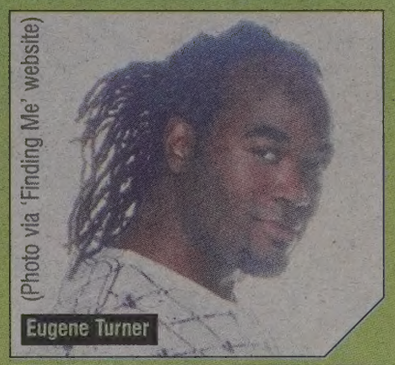
ITLA Interfaith Service featuring Bishop Yvette Flunder of City of Refuge, 2:30 – 4:30 p.m.

ITLA Sunday in the Park, 2 - 8 p.m., Piedmont Park, exact location TBA. Free, inthelifeatl.com

ITLA "Under 25 Pool Party," 3 – 6 p.m.

The final tour of **"Walk Like A Man — The Play"** returns to Atlanta at 3 p.m. at the Ivy Theatre on Avondale. All seats $20. www.eventbrite.com

Grown and Sexy with Wassup N ATL at Djangos, 7 p.m., 495 Peachtree St. NE, www.wassupnatl.com


(Photo via 'Finding Me' website)
Eugene Turner

(Photo by AP)
Keri Hilson

Traxx and Friends Reunion and **Old Skool House Party**. 8 pm. at Club Miami. www.traxxatlanta.com

ITLA Fashion Show, 8 – 10 p.m.

The Lion's Den hosts **Keri Hilson** and others, 9 p.m.-4 a.m., Atlanta Peach Ballroom Nightclub, 3365 Buford Hwy. NE, atlpeachballroom.com, thelionsdenatlanta.moonfruit.com

Traxx Girls presents Showtime with **V103 Miss Sophia** and **Keri Hilson**, 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. at Atlanta Live, aka Dreamz, 3595 Clairmont Road. www.traxxgirls.com

Ladies at Play presents its 7th annual dance party for Black Gay Pride. 9 p.m., French American Brasserie, 30 Ivan Allen Jr. Blvd., www.ladiesatplay.com

MONDAY, SEPT. 7

ITLA **Weekend Wind Down Pool Party**, 1 – 5 p.m.

MTV star **Aneesa** will be on hand for a rooftop pool party for Pureheat. 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Renaissance Hotel, 590 W. Peachtree. www.pureheatalanta.com

The **All White Party** features V103's **Miss Sophia** and **Sheree** of the "Real Housewives of Atlanta." 10 p.m. to 3 a.m. at Lava Lounge, 57 13th St. www.pureheatatlanta.com

Wassup N ATL presents **Privy Monday**. 10 p.m.-3 a.m. Sidebar, 79 Poplar St. NW # A. www.wassupnatl.com

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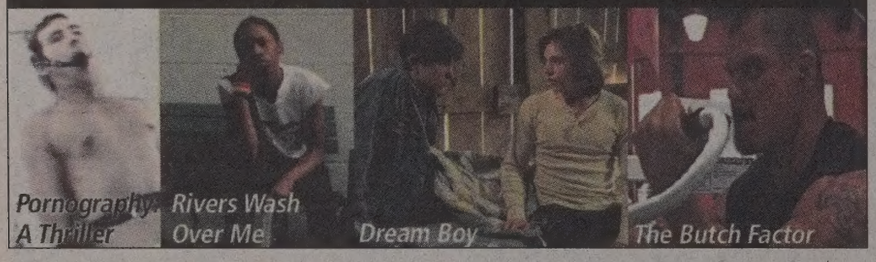

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Gay organizations strive for accountability

Activists say staying honest leads to success of organization's mission

By MATT SCHAFER
mschafer@sovo.com

Jeff Graham has participated in nearly every gay protest in Atlanta during the past 20 years and says there is always a "gut check" before he takes a stand on an issue.

"Really, it happens with every position that I have taken," Graham said. "There is always a gut check, between my own personal integrity and my own personal beliefs, and the roles I have held in the community both as a volunteer and as a professional, and it is an ongoing process."

As executive director of Georgia Equality, the state's largest gay advocacy organization, Graham is now expected to balance the desires of its donors, volunteers and the needs of its community.

"It is always a fine balancing act of being responsible to the donors and key volunteers, and recognizing that there is a responsibility to the community at large," he said.

Part of being honest is possibly disappointing organizations looking for help. Graham said the needs of Midtown, suburbs, smaller cities like Macon and rural communities are all different, and Georgia Equality can't be all things to all people.

How does Georgia Equality address all the different needs?

"There are two things," Graham said. "One is being able to understand and represent the concerns and the needs of people across state, and two, being honest to let them know what our capacities are in our ability to represent them."

ETHICS AND HONESTY

State Rep. Karla Drenner (D-Avondale Estates) has a reputation for being upfront.

"I've found if you listen to someone, even if you don't agree with them, and you're honest with them, it's easier than saying what you think they want to hear," Drenner said.

Drenner essentially has two constituencies: the voters of House District 83 who have elected her five times, and gay Georgians who look to her as the only openly gay state legislator.

While there are always some people in her district and in the gay community who disagree with her, Drenner believes if she listens to someone's argument she's doing them a better service than ignoring them or saying something only to make them happy.

"There are lot of dishonest people in my world, they will tell you one thing and do another, and I think they're ethically challenged," she said.

National organizations like Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation require a constant cycle of self-review in order to stay true to their missions. Sally Ringo is a member of GLAAD's board of directors and works as a marketing focus group moderator in Atlanta.

Part of honesty for a board member of a political organization is to know when the mission of the organization is more important than a member's own feelings. Ringo said there have been times where she has questioned whether her own feelings were the right moves for GLAAD, but they are rare because of her belief in GLAAD's mission.

"I feel like if our work was absent, or nonexistent, that we would be in the Dark Ages in the terms of acceptance by the broader population," she said.

BUILDING ALLIANCES

Craig Washington has been one of the loudest voices for activism in the African-American gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community. He said honesty in activism comes from listening to other people.

"I think it's important in my writing and my work to identify my points of privilege, my personality, my culture... so by no means am I arrogant enough to believe that I am Craig Everyqueer," Washington said. "I am blessed enough to be in certain positions that people assign me a certain amount of credibility, that people listen to what I'm saying, and that requires a certain amount of responsibility."

Part of that responsibility for Washington is not taking up a cause he doesn't believe in. He has been largely silent on the gay marriage debate because he's unsure if marriage is the battle the gay movement ought to be fighting.

"I have wrestled with how to enter the gay marriage issues, because on one hand I believe that gays should have full access to the institution, and I think sometimes we miss the chance to queer the debate if you will," he said. He noted the work of other writers who point out only a small percentage of gay people will benefit from marriage, and said the movement had missed the boat by not exploring other avenues.

Now a member of the recently formed Atlanta Black LGBT Coalition, Washington and other members of the coalition hope to spotlight issues facing their community specifically while working with other organizations.

"When it comes to queer organizing there are two matters of approach that we would do well to reconsider," he said.

"One is how do we build alliances with other progressive causes, how do we build relationships with communities other than our own and act proactively instead of reactively. The other part is asking our allies to do more, speak out more, but that has to be reciprocated," Washington said, adding that racism and among gay people also need to be addressed.

LOOK WITHIN COMMUNITY

RESPECTFUL DISSENT

When Jeff Schade and a half dozen people got together to organize the Nov. 15 local protests against California's Proposition 8, they had to work so quickly they didn't have time to ask themselves questions that looked inward.

"There has been a lot of internal discussion that we have a very positive message and that we're representing the community, but as to whether we're the right people or not I don't think we asked that question because it happened so quickly," Schade said.

They realized early on they would have to tailor their message to reach the spectrum of gay Atlantans.

"We definitely had to evolve our message into something that embraced the community," Schade said.

Jamie Ensley, president of the Georgia Log Cabin Republicans, was one of the opposing voices to the "All I Want for Christmas is Equal Rights" protest on Dec. 13 at Lenox Mall, organized by Schade and other leaders of the Prop. 8 protests. Ensley was concerned the protest could hurt small business owners and harass shoppers, but he eventually supported the protest.

Top: State Rep. **Karla Drenner** (D-Avondale Estates), Georgia's only openly gay lawmaker, believes successful leadership requires listening to others even when you disagree with them. (File photo) Above: For **Craig Washington**, part of being accountable as a community activist is never letting yourself believe that you are 'Everyqueer.' (Photo by Bo Shell)

"I'm there to stand by everybody, I'm there to stand by my HRC friends, my Stonewall [Democrats] friends, but if it is something that I feel is the wrong way to handle something, I'm going to speak out about it," Ensley said.

The LCR mission is to advance GLBT issues through the Republican Party, which means sometimes calling out fellow Republicans.

"I think of all organizations we have to stay honest with what we're doing," Ensley said. "I think it's hard if you have someone you like and they trash talk the gay community. You have to speak out about it."

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Would gay relationships last longer with marriage?

RELATIONSHIPS, continued from **Page 5**

Being openly gay outside of bars and other gay venues can increase the odds of finding a partner who doesn't have a drink in his or her hand, said Michele O'Mara, a couples therapist in Indiana who works with gay and lesbian couples.

"What strikes me most noticeably is that the people in these long-term relationships - 25, 30, even 50 years — is that they're not at the bar, they're at the grocery story," said O'Mara, who added that being out and comfortable with their sexuality also contributes to the longevity of the gay couples she works with.

"Rarely have I seen people who have been together for a long time who feel really bad about who they are as a person," O'Mara said.

As discriminatory as same-sex marriage bans are, the hard truth is that legalized gay marriage won't be a magic wand that makes same-sex relationships more successful.

"I don't think I have ever heard a couple, from the thousands of couples that I've worked with, come into a counseling session and zero-in on the legality of same-sex marriage [as the source of their problems]," O'Mara said.

Brian James agreed that Georgia's same-sex marriage ban is not currently disenfranchising his relationships.

"I don't think gay marriage would help me at all if it were legal," said James, 21. "It's the boys that are my problem - everybody just wants sex or the next-best-thing. I would be scared to marry a man right now because marriage isn't going to stop him from going online and doing what he wants to do."

The central role of the internet in gay dating also makes it difficult to establish meaningful romantic relationships, Bowman said.

"The internet has given sort of an instant gratification that has taken away some of the social and building aspects [of a relationship] that allow it to progress to something long-term," Bowman said.

'RIGHT TO FAIL OR SUCCEED'

The lack of serious relationships in Bowman's life means same-sex marriage isn't in his top five priorities.

"I do think it is too small of a targeted issue that doesn't affect the masses," said Bowman, who added that gay organizations should focus more on anti-discrimination and hate crimes laws. "Those impact more people in the gay community than the issue of gay marriage."

But Sonja Gomez has been with her partner for more than three years and believes they and many other same-sex couples are fully prepared for marriage.

"I think I'm as ready as any straight person would be," Gomez, 37, said. "And I don't think I should have to prove that my love is real or worthy of marriage. I know my heart. That's enough for me, either way; but it's wrong for the government to tell me who I cannot love or marry."

The lack of government recognition for same-sex couples — and more recently the government's outright hostility to recognizing these couples — helps create a lack of optimism in the gay dating scene.

"Any time you don't feel equal in one area, it may stifle what your goals are and what you think is realistic," said Bowman, who added that same-sex marriage may have encouraged him to stick with his domestic partner. "Possibly we could've worked on our issues a little bit more, or maybe we would've waited a little longer before entering into something so strong as marriage."

Societal opposition to same-sex unions means many gay men and lesbians have to clear "the huge hurdle of is it OK for me to pursue even dating someone of the same sex," O'Mara said.

"If we had the legal right to marry, there would be more societal confidence in the validity and visibility of our relationships," said O'Mara, who added that securing same-sex marriage is about "the right to fail or succeed in relationships."

O'Mara hopes increasing acceptance of gay people will result in future generations of gay and lesbian youth being able to approach relationships without the baggage of homophobia and the toll it takes on interpersonal relationships.

"I think they have a leg up in terms of feeling better about themselves — they have more support," O'Mara said. "One day they can approach relationships with all of the same deficiencies as the rest of us, in terms of communicating and things like that."

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Atlanta transplants' deft harmonies defy labels

GET TO KNOW GIRLYMAN

Girlyman is (left to right) **Nate Borofsky**, **Doris Muramatsu** and **Ty Greenstein**.

SO SOUTHERN VOICE VO scene

(Photo by Lynnly Labovitz)

By RYAN LOFTIS

NOT EVEN ITS MEMBERS ARE ENTIRELY SURE what will happen during Girlyman's Jan. 9 performance at Eddie's Attic in Decatur.

"Every Girlyman show is different," says band member Doris Muramatsu. "We change up our set lists and improvise silly tuning songs, tell amusing stories and mix this kind of lightness with some seriously arranged songs that come straight from the heart."

One thing Muramatsu is sure of, though, is the attitude she and fellow members Nate Borofsky and Ty Greenstein will project.

"Expect to see people who really love what they do, who clearly are the best of friends and who love making people feel good about themselves," she says.

Borofsky expects Girlyman to play songs from all four of its albums during the performance, as well as likely songs for its fifth, an as-yet untitled project planned for release this spring. Between songs they will attempt to make each other laugh.

"It's a big part of how we relate to each other," he says.

The Jan. 9 show will mark the seventh time Girlyman has performed at Eddie's Attic.

"I like that Eddie's is a true listening room with audiences who come there wanting to hear every line of a song," Muramatsu says. "I also like how the space feels super cozy and welcome, and that you kind of feel like you're playing in your living room."

Girlyman's musical style is generally classified as folk, although Muramatsu says its sound is a "little edgier than that." She describes the three-part harmony as having overtones of pop, folk and bluegrass and occasionally including classical or choral arrangements.

"I like that we are not bound to one style, that our influences are from many different types of music," Muramatsu says. "But what I like most is that it is centered around the complexities of our voices and how they can weave back and forth into a seamless whole."

Girlyman performances utilize a variety of instruments. Muramatsu plays banjo, guitar and mandolin. Greenstein also plays mandolin, in addition to percussion and guitar, while Borofsky plays baritone guitar. The instruments change hands after nearly every song.

ALL THREE MEMBERS OF GIRLYMAN CURRENTLY reside in Atlanta, but the band was formed in Brooklyn, N.Y. Muramatsu, Greenstein and Borofsky were roommates who were frustrated by their difficulties succeeding in the music industry and decided to form a band. During a brainstorming session the name Girlyman was suggested.

"As soon as one of us said it, we knew it was right for us," Muramatsu says. "It kind of captured the levity of who we are as well as addressing gender and identity in a lighthearted way."

Not only is the band's name funny and provocative, Borofsky says, but it demonstrates a truth about the members: they've never felt like they entirely fit in.

"It's something we're kind of used to," he says of feeling like an outsider. "It's not a horrible, traumatic experience, it's just who we are. It's both frustrating and empowering depending on the circumstances."

Muramatsu rejects the idea of labeling Girlyman as queer, gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual or straight.

"I would say that we are a band that attracts people of all ages, identities and genders," she says. "The heart of what we do goes beyond any kind of label, and we just hope that we attract the people who are searching for the kind of music and harmonies that we do."

Borofsky disagrees.

"We tend to use queer because it sort of captures all of the above," he says. "It captures all of us effectively. I think there's elements of all of those letters [LGBT] in the band."

GIRLYMAN'S FIRST REHEARSAL WAS SCHEDULED for Sept. 11, 2001, and the tragedy of that day gave them a mission.

"After Sept. 11, we realized that all of that [professional struggles] was pretty insignificant, and that the main thing was that music felt like the most healing and loving thing we could do for ourselves and for others, and committed ourselves, informally, to that cause," Muramatsu says. "To this day, I feel like we have stayed true to ourselves and continue to make music because it brings us joy. Hopefully, that's what people will get out of listening to us or coming to a show."

Music has brought Girlyman not just joy but acclaim. The Village Voice described Girlyman as "really good, really unexpected and really different," while OUT Magazine challenged listeners not to fall in love. Remember Who I Am, the group's debut CD, won a 2004 Independent Music Award, and caught the eye of one of the judges, Amy Ray of the Indigo Girls, who signed them to her label Daemon Records and invited them on tour.

By then, life on the road was nothing new to Girlyman. Its first show, at Club Passim in Cambridge, Mass., on Feb. 3, 2002, marked the beginning of a career that would have them performing in approximately 40 states as well as the District of Columbia. Today they travel across the country in the Girlyvan, a 21-foot Dodge Sprinter van, to perform for the "girlyfans."

AS THEIR SUCCESS GREW, THE THREE CONTINUED to share a small Brooklyn apartment for 7 years. Eventually, enough was enough.

"After touring, working and living together for so long, we knew a big change was necessary, and Atlanta really called to us," Muramatsu says.

Borofsky and Greenstein moved to Atlanta in June 2007. Muramatsu joined them in May 2008. They live separately, but in close proximity to each other.

"Ever since Doris has moved down it's felt a lot easier," Borofsky says. "Just being able to say, 'Hey do you want to practice tonight?' The three of us also really enjoy each other's company. It's being able to be around each other more."

Both Muramatsu and Borofsky found Atlantans to be friendlier than New Yorkers. Muramatsu says she loves being able to have her first car, afford living on her own and leave cookies on friend's porches without worrying they'll be stolen.

Given the sheer volume of singers in New York, Borofsky never really felt part of its music community, but says he feels at home in the acoustic singer-songwriter scene at Eddie's Attic.

"The people at Eddie's Attic work really hard to make a feeling of there, and I think certainly we're all appreciative of that," he says. "I feel welcome whenever I go there."

Girlyman
Jan. 9, 8 p.m. at Eddie' Attic
515-B North McDonough St., Decatur
404-377 4976, www.eddiesattic.com
www.girlyman.com

'Battlestar Galactica,' Page 19 • Poet Mark Doty, Page 20 • 'Stylista' slurs, Page 23

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Black gay activists: Ebenezer should dump Warren as MLK Day speaker

Speech at Atlanta church set for day before Obama's inauguration

By LAURA DOUGLAS-BROWN
lbrown@sovo.com

The Atlanta Black LGBT Coalition last week called on Ebenezer Baptist Church, the historic church where Dr. Martin Luther King served as pastor, to remove Pastor Rick Warren as the keynote speaker for its upcoming MLK Day service.

"Rev. Warren's hateful opposition to civil rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and reproductive rights for women, and his intolerance of diversity contradict the values of freedom and equality that this day represents," the group said in a Dec. 24 press release.

The coalition called on Ebenezer's pastor, Rev. Raphael G. Warnock, to rescind the invitation to Warren to speak at the Jan. 19 service.

The church did not respond to an interview request by press time.

"Bestowing Rev. Warren such a prominent role does not foster greater understanding between divided communities. Instead it drives more wedges between disenfranchised communities that are continually pitted against each other by the agents of racism and homophobia," the gay coalition said.

Held each year to commemorate the national holiday honoring King, the church service at Ebenezer attracts media, politicians and civil rights leaders from around the nation. Last year, then-Democratic hopeful Barack Obama spoke to the church the day before the national holiday, delivering a rousing call to responsibility that included a challenge to black churches to renounce homophobia.

Obama told the mostly black audience that "our own community has not always been true to King's vision of a beloved community," in part because "we have scorned our gay brothers and sisters instead of embracing them."

Pastor **Rick Warren** said he's not anti-gay, but he's 'opposed to gays using the term marriage for their partnership.' (Photo by AP)

This year's MLK Day service takes place the day before Obama will be inaugurated as the nation's first African-American president. Warren, pastor of California's Saddleback Community Church and author of "The Purpose Driven Life," has also been tapped by Obama to give the invocation at his Jan. 20 inauguration, sparking outrage from gay activists who note Warren's vocal opposition to gay marriage.

"I don't know what Rev. Warnock's motives are. I do know that the invitation is an affront to queer communities," Craig Washington, a leader of the Atlanta coalition, said in an interview. "It does nothing to unify the community, it drives the wedge deeper. I think Ebenezer, like Obama, is seeking to find some political currency with the conservative movement in this country."

Another group of Atlanta activists is organizing a protest during Warren's speech at the church. Jeff Shade is one of the organizers for the massive Nov. 15 rally at the State Capitol for marriage equality and the smaller Dec. 13 "All I Want for Christmas is Equal Rights" picket at Lenox Mall. Schade said they are organizing another event for Warren's visit, although details were not finalized at press time.

"I'm not exactly sure what direction it will take. Martin Luther King Day here in Atlanta is a big day, so we're clearly trying to be positive, and send the right message," Schade said.

— Matt Schafer contributed.

Not anti-gay to oppose gay marriage, Warren says

NEW YORK (AP) — Pastor Rick Warren, chosen by President-elect Barack Obama to pray at his inauguration despite his support of a gay marriage ban, said he doesn't equate gay relationships with incest or pedophilia, but opposes redefining marriage just as any conservative Christian would.

Warren said that disagreeing with gay-rights activists on same-sex marriage does not qualify as hate speech and doesn't mean he is anti-gay. He also said Obama chose him to give the invocation at the swearing-in to show that people with different views don't have to demonize each other.

"We're both willing to be criticized in order to try to bring America into a new day of civil discourse and to create a new model that says you don't have to agree only with your side on everything," Warren said in a video posted by Saddleback Community Church.

Gay-rights advocates were enraged that Obama had given the evangelical clergyman a prominent role at the Jan. 20 inauguration. Obama said he wanted the event to reflect diverse views and insisted he remains a "fierce advocate" of equal rights for gays.

Warren backed Proposition 8, which banned gay marriage in his home state of California, where he founded Saddleback. He recently said that he opposes any redefinition of marriage, including a brother marrying a sister, or an adult marrying a child.

In his video, Warren insisted he wasn't equating gay marriage with incest or child molestation.

"I have in no way ever taught that homosexuality is the same thing as a forced relationship between an adult and a child, or between siblings," Warren said. "I was trying to point out I'm not opposed to gays having their partnership. I'm opposed to gays using the term marriage for their partnership."

Fauver picks up gay challenger in Atlanta City Council race

Stadtlander to officially announce candidacy this week

By MATT SCHAFER
mschafer@sovo.com

The only openly gay member of the Atlanta City Council will face at least one opponent in the Nov. 3 election. Charlie Stadtlander, a former member of the Log Cabin Republicans, will officially declare his candidacy on Jan. 7.

Stadtlander, who is gay, is an elementary school teacher who moved to Atlanta two years ago and quickly involved himself in the city's political scene. He will oppose two-term Council member Anne Fauver for the District 6 seat.

"Although I've been here two years, I moved here after college," Stadtlander said. "I've fallen in love with Atlanta and I've watched under Anne Fauver's tenure our city has fallen into a financial crisis."

Stadtlander's campaign website includes an extensive campaign team featuring many who are well-known in gay Atlanta. Among them are Frances Ann Moran and Ebonee Bradford, campaign co-chairs; Jamie Ensley, treasurer; and Tracy Elliott, health and wellness policy advisor.

Since he's been in Atlanta, Stadtlander's volunteer efforts include working with YouthPride and co-creating the Purple Party, which aimed to foster community between gay Republicans, Democrats and allies while raising money for the Human Rights Campaign. He said the city's current financial crisis prompted him to seek office.

Fauver said she expected opposition and points out she's been working to save the city money.

"I have not been on the finance committee for the past three years, and that would be where the primary oversight was, but I have, in the last four months, worked intensely on finding more revenue for the city other than raising taxes," Fauver said.

Charlie Stadtlander
(Photo courtesy Stadtlander)

She is drafting legislation to extend the $1.50 fee for 911 that exists on cell phones and land lines to voice over internet phone services like Vonage; another bill to require debtors to pay the collection cost; and will introduce a bill to simplify the collection process for false alarm fees that require police or fire to respond to unnecessary calls.

"I'm not through yet, but that's significant, that's probably roughly $10 million," Fauver said of her three proposed bills. She has also pushed the city to seek reimbursement for the training of police officers that leave for other municipalities before working for the city for two years.

Stadtlander is not Fauver's only potential gay opponent. Steve Brodie, who lost an election to Fauver in 2005 by four votes and after a protracted legal battle, has not declared his intentions though rumors persist he plans to run.

"Even if I don't get in it, at least it will liven things up," Brodie said. "As far as where I'm going to be, I'm going to be seeing where things are after the next month."

District 6 includes much of Midtown as well as Virginia Highlands, Druid Hills and Morningside.

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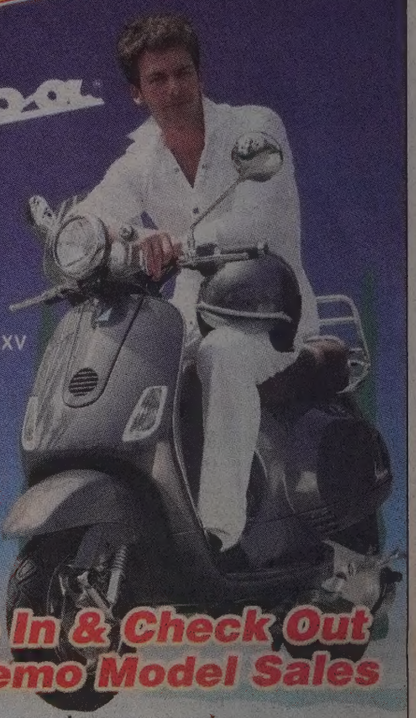

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SOUTHERN VOICE COMMUNITY

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The **Atlanta Lesbian Health Initiative** holds its first **Weight Watchers** meetings of the year at 8:30 a.m. and 10 a.m. at 1530 Dekalb Ave. NE Ste. A. 800-651-6000, www.thehealthinitiative.org

SUNDAY, JAN. 4

Christ Covenant Metropolitan Community Church worships at 11 a.m. at 109 Hibernia Ave., Decatur. 404-373-2933, www.christ-covenantmcc.org

MONDAY, JAN. 5

Charis Books & More hosts the **Faiths & Feminisms Interfaith Book Circle** to discuss "Holy Ground: A Gathering of Voices on Caring Creation," edited by Lyndsay Moseley. 7 p.m at 1189 Euclid Ave. 404-524-0304, www.charisbooksandmore.com

PFLAG meets in the chapel of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta from 7-8:30 p.m. at 1911 Cliff Valley Way NE. 404-634-5134, www.uuca.org

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 7

The **Young Democrats of Georgia** gather at Manuel's Tavern in Virginia Highlands. There will be a new member orientation at 6:30 p.m., followed by a "Mix and Mingle" at 7 p.m. with a business meeting at 7:30 p.m. 602 N. Highland Ave. NE, www.georgiayds.org

THURSDAY, JAN. 8

LaGender Inc., a transgender/transsexual support group, meets at 6 p.m. at Aniz Inc., 233 Mitchell St., Suite 200. 404-767-5644

FRIDAY, JAN. 9

YouthPride hosts its **Black and White Ball** with a live DJ, dancing, drag show at 10 p.m. and a $50 AMEX gift card raffle. 8 p.m. at 1020 DeKalb Ave NE. 404-521-9711, www.youthpride.org

SATURDAY, JAN. 10

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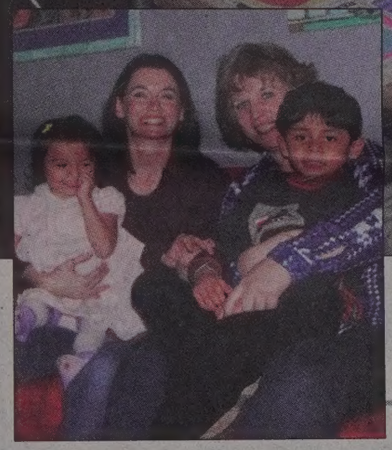
One step at a time

By **MATT SCHAFER**
mschafer@sovo.com

Lesbian couple tries to find ways to help adoptive daughter walk again



Above: **Marie Surprenant**, 3, assembles a puzzle. The braces that she's wearing allow her to stand and move with the help of a walker. Left: **Marie Surprenant**, **Michele Surprenant**, **Laura Baker** and **Kevin Surprenant** pose for a family portrait. (Photos by Matt Schafer)

WHEN SHE WAS LESS THAN A YEAR OLD, MARIE Surprenant's back was broken by her abusive biological parents. Now 3 years old and under the care of her lesbian adoptive mothers, Marie is starting to thrive — but she needs specialized medical treatment if she hopes to walk again.

"They broke her back," Michele Surprenant says. "She suffered very violent physical abuse. She had a lot of fractures and it was just the final that fracture did it... on Christmas Day of all days."

On Christmas Day 2006, Marie arrived in an emergency room where physicians conducted an X-ray that showed multiple fractures running across her young bones like lines on a spider web.

"When I met her I couldn't let her go," Surprenant says. "She was only nine months old. She was 14 pounds, which is really small for a nine-month- old; most babies weigh that much at two months."

Surprenant worked as a social worker at Scottish Right Children's Hospital and had fostered several special needs children in the past. When the foster agency Surprenant worked with asked if she would give Marie a temporary home, something changed for Surprenant.

It wasn't an easy decision. Surprenant was single at the time and had already adopted Kevin, now 6, who also came from an abusive background and faces his own set of challenges.

"She was really tiny, tiny, she was malnourished, she'd been hurt and she couldn't move her legs," Surprenant says. "With both her and Kevin, Fulton County had tagged them to the Fulton County baby orphanage."

DOCTORS SAID MARIE WOULD NEVER WALK AGAIN, need near constant medical attention and never be able to stand. Not satisfied with the prognosis, Surprenant turned to a controversial medical procedure unavailable in the United States — stem cells.

Surprenant and Marie traveled to India, where doctors removed stem cells from her body and then injected them into her spine. The procedure was quick, safe and had almost immediate effects, according to Surprenant.

"It's politics, it's politics. She's had no side effects," Surprenant says of the stem cell injection. "The only side effect is that her circulation has improved."

Marie still wears braces on her legs to help with balance.

"The braces are not unique. They're available to all paraplegics," Surprenant says of the purple plastic braces with butterflies printed on them that Marie must wear in order to stand. "Before the stem cells, when she put on braces, her blood would just stop and get pooled at the bottom of the feet because of the pressure and would make a sore. So what that meant is you could never put her in anything like this because it would mean she'd get some sores."

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Surprenant later met Laura Baker and the two moved in together over a year ago. Now both are parents to Marie and Kevin.

Baker said the changes to Marie after the stem cell injection were stunning. The day after the injection, Marie began to pull herself up on a window ledge.

"She'd had never been able to anything like that before," Baker says. "Because when she crawled it was just her arms and her legs were dead weight behind her, so for her to be able to get up on her knees was amazing."

SURPRENANT AND BAKER WERE ABLE TO PAY FOR Marie's stem cell injection by tapping their savings. As an adopted child, Marie's health care is paid for by Medicaid. But the next part of her treatment isn't covered by the government program.

"This next thing that she needs is the one thing that Medicaid won't pay for, and that's just ironic," Surprenant says. "It's like a stationary bike and it has electrodes, and it's going to zap electrical power into the muscles and basically have the muscles have a workout and pedal these little pedals, and she will do it in a way where her legs are moving."

The machine should help build circulation in her legs and stimulate her spinal cord. In order to raise money to cover the expenses, Surprenant and Baker have turned to the community.

"It's hard," Baker says of asking for money. "That's why we felt better about having the art sale, at least that way people were getting something tangible for their donation."

Baker is an accomplished painter, and a sale of her art at a recent benefit raised $1,200 of the $4,000 they need for the machine. They've also set up a website so people can donate online.

"Right now the science isn't there," Surprenant says of Marie's chances to ever walk without supports. "I think stem cells are going to be eventually what fixes this. We only did one treatment and she some got feeling, so that's always a possibility we could try again down the road."

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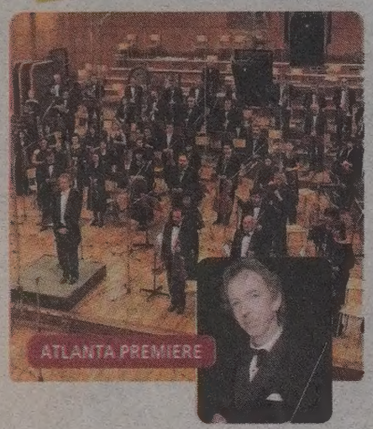

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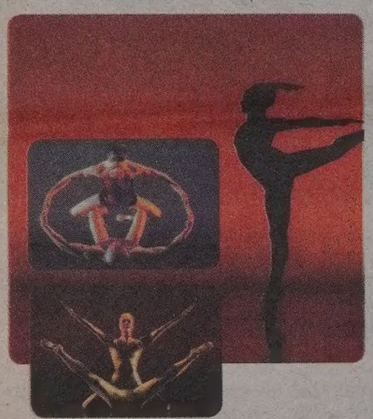

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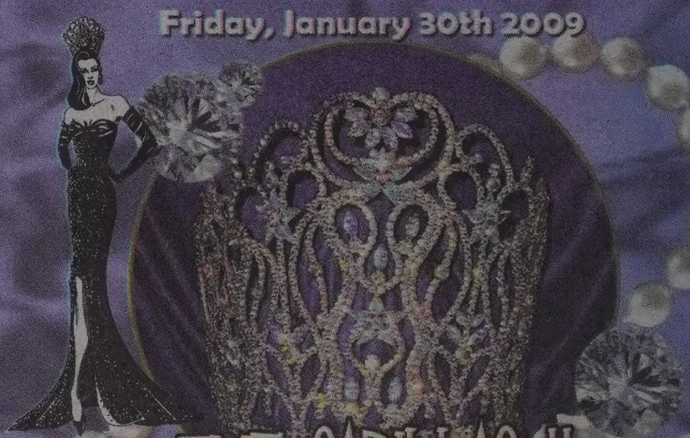

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Celebrating a KING and his queen

Coretta Scott King reflection, Rick Warren protest part of gay MLK activities

By RYAN LEE
rlee@sovo.com 1/2009

Three months after starting a rather glamorous job at the Atlanta airport in 1968, Winston Johnson found himself at the center of history, surrounded by celebrities and dignitaries during one of our nation's darkest hours.

Johnson, who grew up in rural Florida and almost ended his life during college because he was gay, moved to Atlanta with his lifelong partner, Leon Allen, in 1967. Shortly after arriving, Johnson was hired by an airline to cater to its high-end travelers, taxiing them from their planes to the airline's celebrity lounge.

On April 5, 1968, Johnson was assigned to drive for Abigail McCarthy, whose husband, U.S. Sen. Eugene McCarthy (D-Minn.), was running for president that year. Knowing that Abigail McCarthy was enduring a multi-hour layover, Johnson informed her that the plane carrying the body of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., who was assassinated in Memphis the day before, was about to arrive at the Atlanta airport.

McCarthy told Johnson that she and King's wife, Coretta Scott King, were close friends and asked him to drive her to the plane. As her husband's body and bronze casket were being unloaded from an airplane chartered by Robert Kennedy, Coretta Scott King embraced Abigail McCarthy and invited her to a gathering at the King home.

McCarthy asked Johnson if it was OK for him to drive her outside the airport, and soon, the two of them were in Dr. King's living room with the likes of Harry Belafonte and other celebrities, activists and politicians.

"People were just in shock," Johnson, 67, recalled. "It was just so strange to me. Here was this worldwide event, and somehow I kind of ended up in the middle of it."

Johnson recreates the moment he met Coretta Scott King, and the subsequent decades-long friendship that evolved between the two of them, during an MLK celebration at YouthPride Jan. 16.

Johnson will take part in a discussion with Dave Hayward of the gay Atlanta history project Touching Up Our Roots, who believes Johnson's historic friendship with Mrs. King needs to be shared with gay youth.

'I'll be there'

As Coretta Scott King grew into her own role as an activist and public speaker, Johnson often served as her airport driver. The two became close friends.

"We hit it off immediately and really liked each other," said Johnson, who began volunteering to help Coretta Scott King create the King Center in honor of her late husband.

Johnson and his partner were also involved in civil rights efforts, but the two closeted men were wary of participating in gay rights politics. Johnson's struggles with his sexual orientation once brought him seconds from racing his car off a Florida road, and almost cost him his job at the airport when a supervisor asked him if he was a homosexual.

The quiet, closeted life the couple had carved out was dramatically disrupted in 1986, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Bowers v. Hardwick — a case that arose from Atlanta — that it was within a state's right to arrest gay people who violated the state's sodomy law by engaging in oral or anal sex.

"It just blew us out of the water," Johnson said. "You can imagine, back then, how scary that was."

Johnson and Allen got in touch with gay activists at the Human Rights Campaign and soon became a part of the movement. Johnson thought to call Coretta Scott King and explain to her the injustice of the Bowers v. Hardwick decision, but first he would have to come out to her after almost 20 years of friendship.

Atlanta resident **Winston Johnson** befriended the late **Coretta Scott King**, and helped her become active in the gay rights movement. (Photo courtesy of Johnson)

"I said, 'There's something that we should've talked about years ago, but we just haven't,'" Johnson recalled. "She responded really beautifully, and said, 'I can see that you and Leon loved each other.'

"I said, 'I'm telling you this because I want you to do something,'" Johnson added. "She said, 'You just tell me where and when, and I'll be there.'"

That fall, MLK's widow made her first public comments in support of gay rights, an issue she continued to champion until her death in 2006.

As he prepares to address YouthPride, Johnson reflects on messages he wishes he had heard as a young gay person struggling with his identity.

"That I was OK, that I was OK just like I was," said Johnson, who has also learned the value of coming out. "If you know someone loves you, they're still going to love you. That would've been wonderful, and that's the main thing I'll be telling those kids at YouthPride."

Warren protest

One message to gay youth that Johnson does not look forward to during MLK weekend is the appearance of Rev. Rick Warren at King's Ebenezer Baptist Church on Jan. 19, a day before Warren delivers the invocation at President-elect Barack Obama's inauguration.

Warren has been widely criticized by gay rights activists for supporting bans on same-sex marriage, and suggesting that legalization of same-sex unions might lead to incestuous or polygamous marriages.

"Knowing his anti-gay views and seeing him next to the U.S. president, that would've been pretty bad for me to take at 15," Johnson said.

The Atlanta Black LGBT Coalition is leading a protest of Warren's appearance at Ebenezer at 9 a.m. on Jan. 19.

"We are going to be present and taking a stand to assert our humanity," said Craig Washington, one of the founding members of the Black LGBT Coalition, which is working with Georgia Equality, GLBT ATL and Spark to coordinate the protest.

"In a pointed way, we're challenging the homophobia and patriarchy that Warren's stances perpetuate," Washington said. "It's unfortunate, and it's a backpedaling of progress when we elevate someone as bigoted as Rick Warren to serve in a prominent role in the inauguration. It contradicts the promise, quite frankly. It contradicts the promise that Obama has symbolized."

The exact location of the Jan. 19 protest has not been determined, but it will likely take place in the vicinity of the King Center, which is the protest's primary target, Washington said.

After the protest, organizers host the annual Bayard Rustin/Audre Lorde Community Breakfast at 139 Ralph McGill Blvd., which has become a staple for gay activists and allies during MLK weekend.

The organizing committee for the annual MLK march includes the Bayard Rustin/Audre Lorde breakfast on its official schedule of events, and is continuing its tradition of inviting gay and transgender speakers to the mainstream MLK march. This year's gay speaker is Michael Brewer, a young activist who worked to decrease homophobia at his school, Morehouse College.

"The MLK march itself has always been, as long as I've been in Atlanta, one of the most welcoming events," Washington said. "The organizing committee has been so inclusive of its LGBT members and our presence."

Following the breakfast, a gay contingency will meet at the corner of Peachtree and Ellis streets to join in the annual citywide MLK march, then listen to Brewer along with other speakers.

local news

Morehouse plans mandatory homophobia seminars

Accused baseball bat attacker scheduled to enter plea next week

By JENNIFER J. SMITH

Gay students and activists continue to criticize the lack of public details and action taken by Morehouse College officials after an apparent anti-gay attack on the campus Nov. 3.

Despite previously downplaying homophobia at Morehouse and refusing to label the attack a hate crime, Eddie Gaffney, Morehouse College dean of student affairs, announced last week the school will now require students to attend sessions on homophobia, sexual harassment, anger management and diversity.

"Lesson learned," Gaffney told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. "We hate that this happened. But it's an opportunity to do some things differently, to do some new and innovative things, and take a leadership role in terms of how we begin to deal with the whole issue of homophobia."

But local activists dismissed the university's apparent reversal.

"We're sorry that a black man had to have his head beaten in with a baseball bat for Morehouse to 'learn their lesson,'" said Khalid Kamau, a spokesperson for ASSEFA, an ad hoc committee of students and activists formed in response to the attack.

Morehouse appointed an as yet unnamed dean who will live on the 2,800-student campus to oversee the seminars, the Journal-Constitution reported.

Gaffney and other officials declined interviews with Southern Voice through Morehouse media relations manager Elise Durham.

The decision to hold the mandatory seminars comes as alleged assailant Aaron Price readies for a Jan. 9 arraignment hearing in the beating of fellow student Gregory Love, according to the Fulton County District Attorney's office.

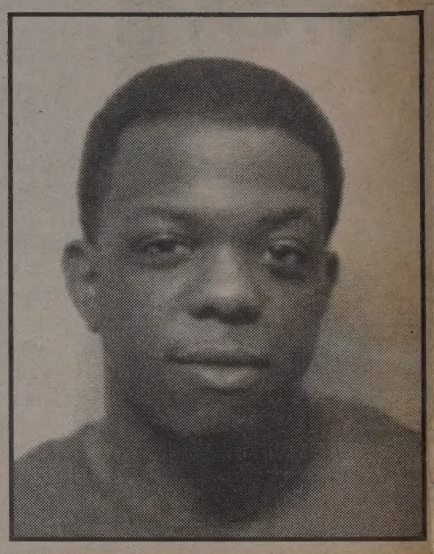
The attack that began with an apparent glance in a dorm shower prompted charges of widespread homophobia at the historically black all-male private school in southwest Atlanta.

Love was beaten "approximately six to seven times, about the face, head, shoulders, back and arms" with a baseball bat in the bathroom of the Brazeal Hall dormitory, according to an incident report filed by the Morehouse College Police Department.

Love, who is nearsighted and wasn't wearing his glasses, told police he thought Price was his roommate.

Morehouse expelled Price Nov. 5, and neither Love nor Price have spoken publicly since the attack.

Price was charged with aggravated assault and aggravated battery. District Attorney Paul Howard has said he plans to charge Price with a hate crime, which would add five years to his sentence if he is convicted.



Former Morehouse sophomore **Aaron Price** is scheduled to go before a judge Jan. 9 to enter a plea against charges in the baseball bat assault on Morehouse junior Gregory Love.

Seminars too little, too late?

The seminars are a positive start, according to Keith Boykin, author of "One More River to Cross: Black and Gay in America."

"As an outsider, it seems like it's a good first step," Boykin said. "It looks like a signal that the school is willing to speak to homophobia as an isolated issue and not lump it together with other tolerance issues like previous efforts."

But Morehouse officials continue to make some old mistakes, other activists said.

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Washington compared the announcement to Morehouse's silence after the attack, and the school's unwillingness to label the attack a hate crime.

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Students say problems persist

ASSEFA members charged there is "a real, offensive stonewalling" in the way Morehouse officials have dealt with the attack.

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"They haven't said anything on campus," said Justin Holland, a Morehouse junior. "But I have some serious concerns about who is going to run the seminars and how much research Morehouse officials have put into this."

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"This does not need to be run by someone with a Ph.D. in psychology who has only read studies about gays," he said. "If you want students to listen, the person needs to be gay, needs to be young, and needs to be able to relate to us."

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"There are men who show up to class wearing women's clothes — they may or may not identify as gay," Holland said. "Will the seminars address transsexuality? Will it address lesbian issues?"

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"I'm on full scholarship, and there isn't really anybody left to make any noise," he said. "I think it's important we're still represented here."

Students say the school's conservative approach to issues of sexual orientation is nothing new.

"It's always been that way," said Charles Nelson, a gay student at Morehouse in the early 1980s.

"A friend of mine — Emmanuel Marable, from Alabama — was there with me and was openly gay. He was constantly ridiculed and mocked and harassed to fit in, to suppress his gay side, to conform at all costs," Nelson said. "Emmanuel died of AIDS, and I discovered I was HIV-positive my senior year.

"The unwillingness to address the institutionalized homophobia, the unwillingness to offer the most basic safe sex information on campus, the lack of information available about HIV, I know that led to increased infections and hurt people like Emmanuel," Nelson said.

"I can't imagine it's much better now," he said.

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inside

VOLUME 15, NUMBER 47

LOCAL NEWS	3
NATIONAL NEWS	5
LOCAL YEAR IN REVIEW	12
REGIONAL YEAR IN REVIEW	15
NATIONAL YEAR IN REVIEW	17
FORUM	20
FORUM YEAR IN REVIEW	22
PERSONALS	50
CLASSIFIEDS	52

calendars

COMMUNITY	10
NOTES	11

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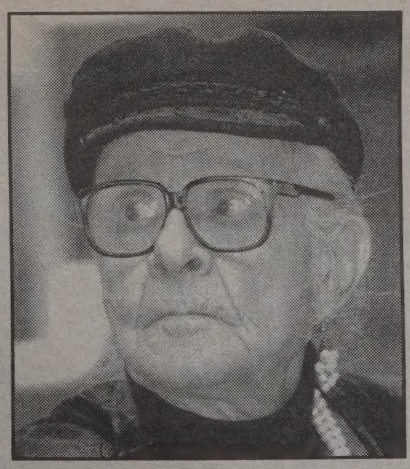

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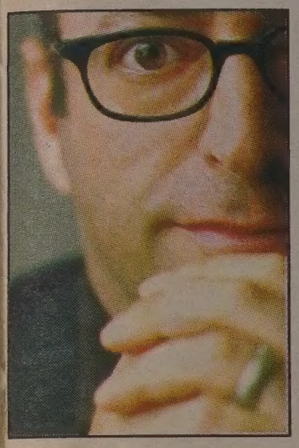
national news

Herb Ritts, gay celebrity photographer, dies at 50



Gay photographer **Herb Ritts**, shown in an undated handout photo, rose to fame by capturing revealing and unorthodox portraits of celebrities. (Photo by Mark Hanauer/AP)

LOS ANGELES — Herb Ritts, a gay photographer known for his work with celebrities including Madonna, died Dec. 26 at the age of 50 from complications from pneumonia, according to the New York Times. Ritts, whose survivors include his partner, entertainment attorney Erik Hyman, made his name capturing revealing, often unorthodox portraits of famous people. Born in Los Angeles in 1952, he earned a degree from Bard College in economics, went to work for his family's furniture business, and became a photographer almost by accident. He got to know Richard Gere in the 1970s through someone the actor was dating. A drive in the desert led to a flat tire and an impromptu photo session at a service station. At the time, Gere was an unknown. A year later he was a star, and Ritts' photos were used as publicity shots. Ritz went on take pictures of Madonna, Elizabeth Taylor, Cindy Crawford, George Clooney and other celebrities for top fashion and culture magazines. He published several books of photographs and did work for top fashion designers. He also took pictures for album covers and directed music videos for artists including Janet Jackson and Chris Isaak. Ritts also helped raise charity funds, often for AIDS groups.

Miss. judicial group wants reprimand for judge's anti-gay comments

JACKSON, Miss. — The Mississippi Supreme Court should reprimand and fine George County Justice Court Judge Connie Glenn Wilkerson over anti-gay remarks he made in a letter to a local newspaper, the Mississippi Commission on Judicial Performance recommended on Dec. 20. Lambda Legal Defense & Education Fund, a gay legal group, filed the complaint against Wilkerson in April, according to the Clarion-Ledger. "In my opinion, gays and lesbians should be put in some type of mental institute instead of having a law like this passed for them," Wilkerson wrote in letter, published March 28 in the George County Times. He was reacting to a California law giving gay partners the same standing to sue for issues like wrongful death as spouses. The legal watchdog group said Wilkerson broke judicial rules by "allowing his extra-judicial conduct to cast a reasonable doubt on the judge's capacity to act impartially as a judge."

Ohio court upholds cameras in rest rooms

YOUNGSTOWN, Ohio — The Seventh Ohio District Court of Appeals ruled Dec. 18 that police do not need a court warrant to hide cameras in public restrooms, the Gay People's Chronicle reported. The court's ruling left in tact the public indecency conviction of James Henry, who is gay. Henry and 12 other men who were suspected of being gay were notified by mail in July that they had been arrested on charges stemming from cameras placed in the parking lot and men's rest room of an Ohio Department of Transportation rest stop. Henry was in the bathroom less than a minute, the Chronicle reported. But his conduct could be construed as masturbation because he stepped back from urinal before zipping his pants, prosecutors argued.

Complaints prompt removal of hate crime info in W. Va. program

CHARLESTON, W. Va. — After complaints from religious groups that information on hate crimes "promoted homosexuality," curriculum organized by the Civil Rights Team Project for use in West Virginia pubic schools will be revised, according to the Charleston Daily Mail. "The materials were not prepared in our office, and as soon as they were brought to our attention we studied them," Deputy Attorney General Fran Hughes said. The material in question was developed by the National Education Association and several gay civil rights groups. It encouraged students and teachers to use "inclusive" language such as "date" instead of boyfriend or girlfriend and "parent" instead of mother or father.

Gay marriage battles loom in seven states

At least seven states will see proposals to either ban or create legal recognition for same-sex couples during their next legislative sessions, according to stateline.org. California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Wisconsin are expected to see bills to offer some legal rights to gay couples. The measures in Connecticut and Massachusetts would grant full marriage rights to gays, a step further than even Vermont, currently the only state to offer equivalent rights to gay couples through a separate status called civil unions. Civil union bills are also on tap in both states. "Granting marriage to gay and lesbian couples would constitute full equality and equal treatment under the law," Arline Isaacson of the Massachusetts Gay & Lesbian Political Caucus told the Web site. But Connecticut and Massachusetts will also see measures to pan legal recognition of gay marriages. Similar gay marriage bans will also be pushed in state legislatures in Ohio and Texas.

From staff and wire reports

local news

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By JENNIFER J. SMITH

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"We're sorry that a black man had to have his head beaten in with a baseball bat for Morehouse to 'learn their lesson,'" said Khalid Kamau, a spokesperson for ASSEFA, an ad hoc committee of students and activists formed in response to the attack.

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inside

VOLUME 15, NUMBER 47

LOCAL NEWS	3
NATIONAL NEWS	5
LOCAL YEAR IN REVIEW	12
REGIONAL YEAR IN REVIEW	15
NATIONAL YEAR IN REVIEW	17
FORUM	20
FORUM YEAR IN REVIEW	22
PERSONALS	50
CLASSIFIEDS	52

calendars

COMMUNITY	10
NOTES	11

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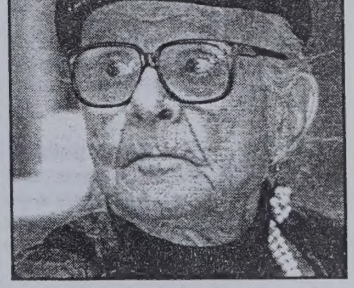

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local news

Gay center looks for new home

Facility splits from AIDS groups at shared site in search of cheaper rent

By CHRISTOPHER SEELY

Two years after several Atlanta AIDS and gay organizations moved into a shared building with great fanfare, at least one tenant at the facility at 159 Ralph McGill Blvd. plans to move out, and economic factors could force the rest to also seek a new home.

The pending changes will affect gay citizens who visit the building for everything from HIV testing and AIDS services to gay support groups and church services.

The former Methodist Center at 159 Ralph McGill houses the Atlanta Gay & Lesbian Center, its STD testing clinic, AIDS Treatment Initiatives, AIDS Survival Project, Positive Impact, two programs sponsored by AID Atlanta, and the gay-inclusive St. Michael the Defender Catholic Church, among others.

The AIDS and gay groups moved into the building in July 2000, touting the advantages of being under the same roof.

But now the gay center has definite plans to relocate to another, "more accessible" space, according to Craig Washington, the group's executive director.

Meanwhile, the fate of the other tenants is undecided after they received an eviction letter from their landlord last month.

Economic downturn hurt plan to fill building

As leaseholder for the 159 Ralph McGill building, Positive Impact received the letter from attorneys representing Inman Park Properties on Nov. 18, according to Paul Plate, executive director of Positive Impact.

Though Inman Park Properties sent the letter to Positive Impact, the implications also affect every tenant in the building, especially AIDS Treatment Initiatives and AIDS Survival Project, because the three AIDS groups are legally bound to each other.

"Our three organizations have a legal lease partnership agreement with one another," said Guy Pujol, executive director of ATI.

Positive Impact "holds the lease" for the three groups, Plate said.

The 10-year lease signed in 2000 currently binds the AIDS groups to pay rent for the entire six-story building, Plate said, allowing the partnership to sublet space to other organizations, like the Gay & Lesbian Center, to raise the $42,000 in monthly rent.

But half the building is currently empty, Pujol said.

"If we had to maintain that standard and pay for that empty space all three of us would have been bankrupt," he said.

The current tenants have not fallen behind on the portions of the rent that they owe, leaders stressed. Each group pays for space it is renting, but the vacant space is not being paid for, Plate said.

Including the money it collected from subleasing, the partnership paid Inman Park Properties $19,000 of the rent money for each of the last three months, Plate said.

Positive Impact signed the lease well before the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks that contributed to an economic downturn affecting businesses and non-profit agencies around the country. The Georgia United Methodist Conference had also just sold the 159 Ralph McGill building because it was building a new space in Norcross.

The Methodists moved to Norcross in November 2001, leaving a large, empty space that the partnership unsuccessfully tried to rent out to 22 different agencies, Plate said. But none of the agencies could afford it, he said.

Pujol said that when the AIDS groups first "negotiated the rent for this building, we got a great deal for the time."

But "within a year after we moved, the dotcom market crashed, the commercial real estate market plummeted, and our great deal became a higher rental rate," he said.

Positive outcome expected

Plate said that Positive Impact received an eviction notice from Inman Park Properties last month.

"We got an eviction notice that said we had to be out in 10 days about 10 days before Thanksgiving," Plate said.

Michelle Duchon, leasing administrator for Inman Park Properties, said that to her knowledge there was "no type of formal eviction notice."

The two sides are amicably working together to find a solution to the rent shortfall, she said.

"We are on good terms with Positive Impact and they are on good terms with us," Duchon said. "We have been happy to have them as tenants."

Positive Impact's lawyer, Jane Morrison, responded to the eviction letter and is in the process of negotiating with Inman Park Properties' lawyer, Carter Stout, Plate said.

Morrison declined comment; Stout did not respond to interview requests.

Positive Impact would like to make a deal to move to another building owned by the landlord with cheaper rent, or to stay at 159 Ralph McGill at a reduced rate, Plate said.

If the three AIDS groups — Positive Impact, AIDS Treatment Initiatives and AIDS Survival Project — do move, they will relocate together, Pujol and Plate said.

In the past few months, the partnership has looked at roughly 20 properties, the best of which is nearby at 139 Ralph McGill Blvd., a property also owned by Inman Park Properties, Pujol said.

"[Inman Park Properties] was willing to entertain our need to break the current lease if we were willing to move into one of their properties," he said.

Jeff Graham, AIDS Survival Project executive director, declined comment on the issue.

Once home to several gay and AIDS groups, the building at 159 Ralph McGill Blvd., will lose at least one tenant as the Atlanta Gay & Lesbian Center looks for a 'more accessible' location. (Photo by R.O. Youngblood)

Gay center to relocate

While it remains unclear whether the three AIDS groups will remain in the 159 Ralph McGill building, the Atlanta Gay & Lesbian Center has definite plans to move.

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A Window Media Publication

PUBLISHER Window Media LLC
PRESIDENT William Waybourn
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR Chris Crain
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National Gay Newspaper Guild
Associated Press
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local news

Gay center looks for new home

Facility splits from AIDS groups at shared site in search of cheaper rent

By CHRISTOPHER SEELY

Two years after several Atlanta AIDS and gay organizations moved into a shared building with great fanfare, at least one tenant at the facility at 159 Ralph McGill Blvd. plans to move out, and economic factors could force the rest to also seek a new home.

The pending changes will affect gay citizens who visit the building for everything from HIV testing and AIDS services to gay support groups and church services.

The former Methodist Center at 159 Ralph McGill houses the Atlanta Gay & Lesbian Center, its STD testing clinic, AIDS Treatment Initiatives, AIDS Survival Project, Positive Impact, two programs sponsored by AID Atlanta, and the gay-inclusive St. Michael the Defender Catholic Church, among others.

The AIDS and gay groups moved into the building in July 2000, touting the advantages of being under the same roof.

But now the gay center has definite plans to relocate to another, "more accessible" space, according to Craig Washington, the group's executive director.

Meanwhile, the fate of the other tenants is undecided after they received an eviction letter from their landlord last month.

Economic downturn hurt plan to fill building

As leaseholder for the 159 Ralph McGill building, Positive Impact received the letter from attorneys representing Inman Park Properties on Nov. 18, according to Paul Plate, executive director of Positive Impact.

Though Inman Park Properties sent the letter to Positive Impact, the implications also affect every tenant in the building, especially AIDS Treatment Initiatives and AIDS Survival Project, because the three AIDS groups are legally bound to each other.

"Our three organizations have a legal lease partnership agreement with one another," said Guy Pujol, executive director of ATI.

Positive Impact "holds the lease" for the three groups, Plate said.

The 10-year lease signed in 2000 currently binds the AIDS groups to pay rent for the entire six-story building, Plate said, allowing the partnership to sublet space to other organizations, like the Gay & Lesbian Center, to raise the $42,000 in monthly rent.

But half the building is currently empty, Pujol said.

"If we had to maintain that standard and pay for that empty space all three of us would have been bankrupt," he said.

The current tenants have not fallen behind on the portions of the rent that they owe, leaders stressed. Each group pays for space it is renting, but the vacant space is not being paid for, Plate said.

Including the money it collected from subleasing, the partnership paid Inman Park Properties $19,000 of the rent money for each of the last three months, Plate said.

Positive Impact signed the lease well before the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks that contributed to an economic downturn affecting businesses and non-profit agencies around the country. The Georgia United Methodist Conference had also just sold the 159 Ralph McGill building because it was building a new space in Norcross.

The Methodists moved to Norcross in November 2001, leaving a large, empty space that the partnership unsuccessfully tried to rent out to 22 different agencies, Plate said. But none of the agencies could afford it, he said.

Pujol said that when the AIDS groups first "negotiated the rent for this building, we got a great deal for the time."

But "within a year after we moved, the dotcom market crashed, the commercial real estate market plummeted, and our great deal became a higher rental rate," he said.

Positive outcome expected

Plate said that Positive Impact received an eviction notice from Inman Park Properties last month.

"We got an eviction notice that said we had to be out in 10 days about 10 days before Thanksgiving," Plate said.

Michelle Duchon, leasing administrator for Inman Park Properties, said that to her knowledge there was "no type of formal eviction notice."

The two sides are amicably working together to find a solution to the rent shortfall, she said.

"We are on good terms with Positive Impact and they are on good terms with us," Duchon said. "We have been happy to have them as tenants."

Positive Impact's lawyer, Jane Morrison, responded to the eviction letter and is in the process of negotiating with Inman Park Properties' lawyer, Carter Stout, Plate said.

Morrison declined comment; Stout did not respond to interview requests.

Positive Impact would like to make a deal to move to another building owned by the landlord with cheaper rent, or to stay at 159 Ralph McGill at a reduced rate, Plate said.

If the three AIDS groups — Positive Impact, AIDS Treatment Initiatives and AIDS Survival Project — do move, they will relocate together, Pujol and Plate said.

In the past few months, the partnership has looked at roughly 20 properties, the best of which is nearby at 139 Ralph McGill Blvd., a property also owned by Inman Park Properties, Pujol said.

"[Inman Park Properties] was willing to entertain our need to break the current lease if we were willing to move into one of their properties," he said.

Jeff Graham, AIDS Survival Project executive director, declined comment on the issue.

Once home to several gay and AIDS groups, the building at 159 Ralph McGill Blvd., will lose at least one tenant as the Atlanta Gay & Lesbian Center looks for a 'more accessible' location. (Photo by R.O. Youngblood)

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Syphilis increase seen at gay clinic

Heath officials worry about major outbreak in Atlanta

By JENNIFER J. SMITH

Syphilis among gay men may be rising sharply in Atlanta, according to the city's gay community center, mirroring a national trend that has hit both urban and rural areas across the country and has health officials concerned that it could hint at a coming surge in HIV cases.

The Atlanta Gay & Lesbian Center's health clinic on Ralph McGill Boulevard sees up to five new cases of sexually transmitted diseases among men per day, a number typically seen in the course of a week, according to Bill King, a nurse at the Center. The majority of the cases are syphilis, he said.

"I'm amazed. I really can't believe it," King said. "This is by far the worst it's ever been."

The surge in reported STD cases at the Center has taken place over the last two months, with cases up almost 400 percent from three months ago, King said.

While the non-profit agency normally treats approximately 20 cases of STDs per month, the clinic now treats approximately 80 cases a month, said Craig Washington, executive director of the Center.

According to King, the increase "hasn't topped out yet," which worries health officials.

"We haven't heard those numbers yet, but if true, they are certainly very concerning," said Ron Valdiserri, deputy director of the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention's Program for HIV, STD & TB Prevention.

The CDC announced just four weeks ago that Fulton County ranked third among counties and cities for syphilis cases in the U.S. in 2001 — behind only Baltimore, Md., and Robeson County, N.C.

"If these numbers are verifiable and this is the first sign of a syphilis outbreak, Fulton County could move to the top of the list of syphilis cases in the U.S.," Valdiserri said.

The Fulton County Department of Health & Wellness could not verify the local increase, according to Dr. Adewele Troutman, director of the county agency. While the county's health data is collected constantly, it is only published annually, he said.

The gay center's clinic reports its data to Fulton County. The Center is one of 17 sites in the county that receives an annual grant from the health department for providing STD screening services, according to Latricia Hughes, a spokesperson for the Department of Health & Wellness.

Syphilis cases up around the country

STD statistics for 2002 aren't available yet for Fulton County, the state of Georgia or the nation. But the CDC recently reported that syphilis cases rose 2 percent around the in cases in a decade to new infections among men in urban areas.

Some 20 U.S. counties and one city — Baltimore — account for more than half of the syphilis cases reported, according to the CDC. That includes Fulton County with 224 cases last year at a rate of 27.5 cases per 100,000 population.

Still, county officials warn against using a two-month increase from one testing site as an indication of how the rest of Fulton County is doing.

"The sample size is so small, you really can't draw statistical significance, but you can look at the trend, and it's not moving in the direction that we want," Troutman said.

The trend is also consistent with past Fulton County STD reports.

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In 2000 and 2001, almost half of the syphilis cases in Georgia were in Fulton County, according to Michelle Allen, a spokesperson for the state's Syphilis Elimination Program.

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CDC reports indicate a decline in syphilis rates among almost all populations — especially among African Americans and women, according to Valdiserri — but a 15 percent jump in the rate for men.

"We know there have been a number of syphilis outbreaks in the past two years in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Seattle and Miami, and the data supports that the increase among men is occurring mostly among [men who have sex with men]," Valdiserri said.

Rise in HIV coming?

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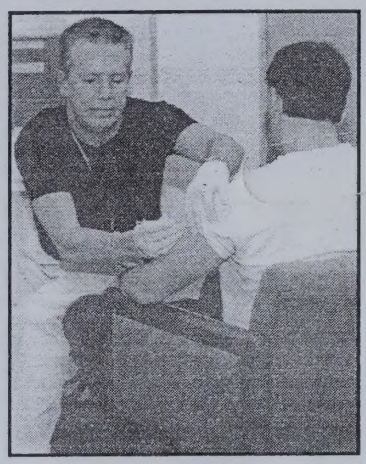

Bill King, a nurse at Atlanta's gay center, said the facility's clinic has seen a dramatic increase in syphilis cases in the area. (Photo by R.O. Youngblood)

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The uptick in reported syphilis cases also causes concern that it portends a rise in HIV, because new cases of STDs show gay and bisexual men are increasingly practicing unsafe sex, according to health officials.

"People need to understand the relationship between syphilis and HIV," Valdiserri said. "If they are infected with one, it becomes more likely they will get the other."

Syphilis infection makes people with HIV more likely to transmit the AIDS virus to a sex partner, and also makes HIV-negative people more likely to acquire the disease from an HIV-positive partner, according to Valdiserri.

Approximately 40 percent of Center clients are surprised to find out they have an STD, King said, making them even more vulnerable to HIV infection.

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The first symptoms of syphilis, which can be cured with antibiotics, are genital sores. Early detection and treatment can eradicate the disease, but untreated cases can cause extreme discomfort and eventually death.

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Gay community center provides support space

Agency offers chances to 'live, learn, love, lead'

By CHRISTOPHER SEELY

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"The average gay person tends to go to the watering hole to go meet with the other water buffaloes," he said.

But that mentality doesn't work for Joiner.

What he sought when he moved to Atlanta in January was an outlet to meet men away from bars. What he found was a group formerly known as the Gay Men's Discussion Group that meets at the Atlanta Gay & Lesbian Center.

Since taking the reins in February, Joiner rejuvenated the discussion group and renamed it GuyTalk.

"There was no leadership at the time I came," he said. "I told them I would be glad to take it over until a permanent one got in place."

Keeping his anti-water-buffalo stance in mind, Joiner revamped a setting for men to gather and discuss a variety of topics.

"In GuyTalk, we focus on one topic only and it can be intensive or controversial or amusing or informative, and it is not centering on a person himself but the topic," he said.

Ben Joiner took the lead in re-organizing a discussion group for men that redefines the way gay men interact socially. (Photo by R.O. Youngblood)

The pre-arranged topics fall in line with survey results after Joiner asked the more than 40 members what they wanted.

"Most people wanted a guest lecturer or a pre-advanced discussion in huge varieties," he said.

Typically, members of GuyTalk mingle for 15 minutes, discuss the week's topic for an hour or so, and leave the Center for a group meal.

But Joiner is quick to assert that GuyTalk is a "fun time — not serious like a chess club, debate society or support group."

"It's the one thing I look forward to every week, and it has given me the chance to network with other people about jobs and good restaurants," he said.

Joiner and the other members of GuyTalk join 100 to 200 people who visit the Center each week, said Craig Washington, executive director of the Center.

Founded in 1976, the non-profit gay is the oldest gay organization in Atlanta. It follows a motto of "live, learn, love, lead."

The building where the Center is currently located connects three separate entities that also include an STD testing clinic and the Center on AIDS & Humanity, where art exhibitions entertain and educate people, Washington said.

The Center provides meeting space for both groups initiated by Center volunteers — like GuyTalk and a coming out group — and pre-existing groups like Second Sunday and Gay Men with Cancer.

A woman's group and a youth group are in the works, Washington said.

Special events also take place at the Center throughout the year, including a free "Rainbow Holiday Yoga" class scheduled for Dec. 15, and a monthly women's sexuality series co-sponsored by the Charis Circle.

In addition, the Center hosts a help line — 404-523-HELP — staffed by trained volunteers, a library, and community town hall meetings, such as a recent event to select members for a gay task force to meet with the Atlanta Police Department.

"We're pleased with the work we've done around community building," Washington said. "The Center played a key role in establishing the LGBT representation to the Atlanta police. We were also heavily involved with addressing the issue of homophobia and increasing people's understanding of gay identity on different gay campuses."

HELPING OUT

Editor's note: Every week throughout the holiday season, Southern Voice highlights a charity organization that lends a hand to gay people and embodies the spirit of giving by Helping Out. E-mail editor@sovo.com with suggestions for future profiles.

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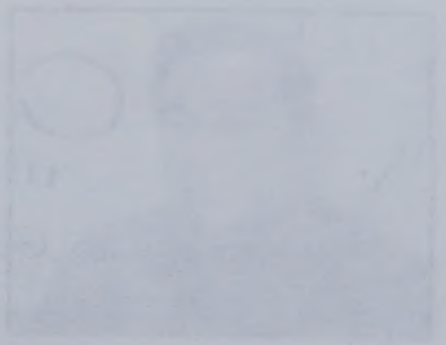

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"It's the one thing I look forward to every week, and it has given me the chance to network with other people about jobs and good restaurants," he said.

Joiner and the other members of GuyTalk join 100 to 200 people who visit the Center each week, said Craig Washington, executive director of the Center.

Founded in 1976, the non-profit gay is the oldest gay organization in Atlanta. It follows a motto of "live, learn, love, lead."

The building where the Center is currently located connects three separate entities that also include an STD testing clinic and the Center on AIDS & Humanity, where art exhibitions entertain and educate people, Washington said.

The Center provides meeting space for both groups initiated by Center volunteers — like GuyTalk and a coming out group — and pre-existing groups like Second Sunday and Gay Men with Cancer.

A woman's group and a youth group are in the works, Washington said.

Special events also take place at the Center throughout the year, including a free "Rainbow Holiday Yoga" class scheduled for Dec. 15, and a monthly women's sexuality series co-sponsored by the Charis Circle.

In addition, the Center hosts a help line — 404-523-HELP — staffed by trained volunteers, a library, and community town hall meetings, such as a recent event to select members for a gay task force to meet with the Atlanta Police Department.

"We're pleased with the work we've done around community building," Washington said. "The Center played a key role in establishing the LGBT representation to the Atlanta police. We were also heavily involved with addressing the issue of homophobia and increasing people's understanding of gay identity on different gay campuses."

HELPING OUT

Editor's note: Every week throughout the holiday season, Southern Voice highlights a charity organization that lends a hand to gay people and embodies the spirit of giving by Helping Out. E-mail editor@sovo.com with suggestions for future profiles.

MORE INFO

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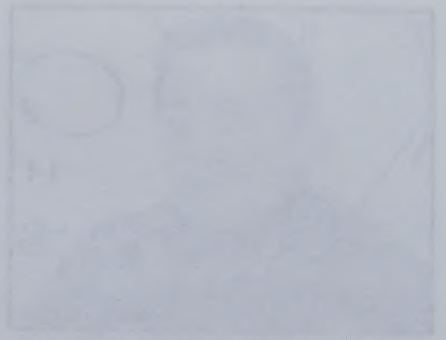

Gay groups prepare to celebrate MLK day

Pre-march breakfast planned for gays, allies

by JENNIFER J. SMITH

Gay Atlantans will join in celebrating the 17th annual Martin Luther King Jr. National Holiday on Jan. 21, marking the event by hosting a first-ever community breakfast before participating as a group in the annual Atlanta march in King's honor.

The Atlanta march marking King's birthday has included an organized gay and gay-friendly contingent for 15 years, according to Lynn Cothren, an openly gay personal assistant to Coretta Scott King, King's widow.

Gay participation in Atlanta's MLK Day events began when protestors opposing the Cracker Barrel restaurant chain's firing of gay employees decided to join the civil rights march, Cothren said.

This year, the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Non-Violent Social Change and several gay non-profit organizations hope to continue that tradition.

"It's important for gays to march because Martin Luther King Jr. was one of the key leaders in a movement that was about social justice and civil rights, in a lot of ways the same rights the lgbt movement has been working for very vividly the past 20 years and certainly since Stonewall," said event organizer Craig Washington.

Washington serves as executive director of the Center, a nonprofit community center serving gays that will co-host a breakfast for gay marchers.

The first-ever "community brunch for lgbt marchers and allies" has been scheduled "as a way of getting people together," he said.

Hosted jointly by ZAMI, a black lesbian nonprofit group, Congregation Bet Haverim, a Reconstructionist synagogue founded for lesbians and gay men, and the Center, the free brunch will be held from 10 a.m. until noon at the Center.

"I wanted to do something before or after the march to capture the energy and momentum," said Washington. "There are too few instances where you have such a wonderful cross section of folks interested in social justice that are willing to come out and participate. I wanted people to meet and eat together."

After the breakfast, marchers will convene at the corner of Peachtree Street and Ellis Street, the historic meeting place for gays participating in the march.

This year's march will be held on Jan. 21, beginning at 1 p.m. The march proceeds from Baker Street and Peachtree Street to the King Center on Auburn Avenue and Boulevard, where a rally is planned.

So far, Congregation Bet Haverim, Georgia Stonewall Democrats and ZAMI have all promised to participate in the march, according to Washington.

Gays participating in last year's MLK Day march included activist Craig Washington and members of the Human Rights Campaign, a national gay rights lobby.

Newly sworn-in City Council President Cathy Woolard, Georgia's first openly gay elected official, has been asked to serve as a grand marshal the event, but her appearance had not been confirmed at press time.

While the march historically draws between 2,000 and 3,000 participants, according to organizers, the gay contingent has recently averaged about 30 to 40 marchers, Washington said.

The link between the King family and gays is an old one.

Bayard Rustin, a close aide to King, was instrumental in planning the historic 1963 March on Washington and was openly gay.

Rustin served as a confidant, advisor and speechwriter to King during the 1960's, despite being forced to resign from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which he had helped create, because of his sexual orientation. Rustin died in 1987 at age 77.

Coretta Scott King has been a longtime advocate of gay rights, including publicly endorsing the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, proposed federal legislation to ban job discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

INFO

Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Monday, Jan. 21

- Pre-march Brunch, 10 a.m. – 12 p.m.
  The Center
  159 Ralph McGill Boulevard, Suite 600
  Atlanta, GA 30308
  404-523-7500
- MLK March, 1 p.m.
  Gay groups meet at the corner of Peachtree Street and Ellis Street
- After March Rally
  Martin Luther King Jr. Center
  449 Auburn Avenue, NE
  Atlanta, GA 30312
  404-526-8900
  info@thekingcenter.org

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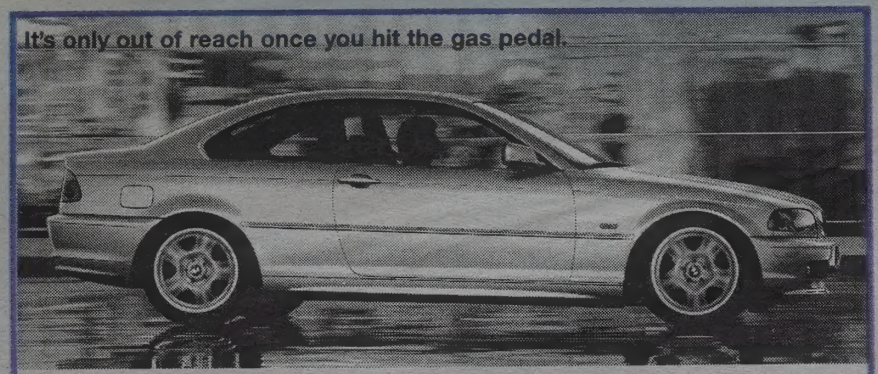

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Neighbors want gay porn site ousted from Fla. subdivision

ORLANDO, Fla. — Neighbors in a high-brow Orlando subdivision want authorities to shut down a 24-hour gay pornography site operating out of a house in the neighborhood, according to the Orlando Sentinel. "When I saw the Web site, I was pretty much shocked that something like that would be running out of a normal, everyday family neighborhood," said George Donovan, who lives across the street and three doors down. Charles Foulk, who leases the house, runs the Web site and is one of five men living there. He said they cause no more commotion than any other household in the neighborhood. Indeed, no one knew what went on in the house until a water balloon broke a window and neighbors came to apologize and fix it. When the front door opened, they saw an array of cameras and posters advertising the site. Authorities said the men have broken now laws. The homeowners association has asked the men to move, but they've refused. "Why would we move?" said Foulk, 33, who uses the pseudonym "Zac Adams" online. "If your neighbors don't like you, do you think you should have to move?"

Man to be retried for 1983 killing of gay La. man

COVINGTON, La. (AP) — A Mississippi man whose 1983 first-degree murder conviction was overturned earlier this year will be retried this year, prosecutors said. "There are facts that have come to light in our review… indicating we still have a good case to try," said Houston Gascon, a St. Tammany Parish assistant district attorney. Charles Faulkner, 46, was convicted for his role in the murder of Steven Radoste of Pearl River. Faulkner's friend, Frederick Kirkpatrick, admitted bludgeoning, stabbing and shooting Radoste to death, but Faulkner was also convicted of murder because he was involved in a related robbery. At trial, Faulkner argued that Radoste provoked the attack by making sexual overtures to Kirkpatrick. U.S. District Court overturned Faulkner's murder conviction in February, blaming the prosecution for suppressing exculpatory evidence of the presence of gay pornographic magazines at the crime scene, leaving the defense with little proof that Radoste was gay.

Preacher convicted on molestation charges set for release

HENDERSONVILLE, N.C. (AP) — A tent-revival preacher who lived as a youth in Henderson County is scheduled for release on Feb. 3 after serving time for convictions associated with the gay prostitution of young boys. In 1988, a federal judge in Roanoke, Va., sentenced Mario Leyva to 20 years in prison after he and two other self-ordained ministers pleaded guilty to molesting young boys. Leyva, now 55, was released from the federal prison system in Virginia on Nov. 22, 2000, and sent to the state's Department of Correction to serve a sentence issued in state court on a sodomy conviction, according to prison officials. In 1989, he pleaded guilty to federal charges of conspiracy and interstate transportation of minor males for prostitution and interstate transportation of minor males

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Backstreet punished

Dance club's liquor license suspended; final decision rests with Atlanta mayor.

Page 3

Gays mark holidays in creative ways

'Family' theme of celebrations by gays of all faiths

Pages 23, 33

(Cover photo by AP; illustration by John Nail)

LOTT OF TROUBLE: Anti-gay comments of U.S. Sen. **Trent Lott** eclipsed by recent furor. **Page 11**

MOVING OUT: One-stop resource may end as gay, HIV groups move from central location. **Page 4**

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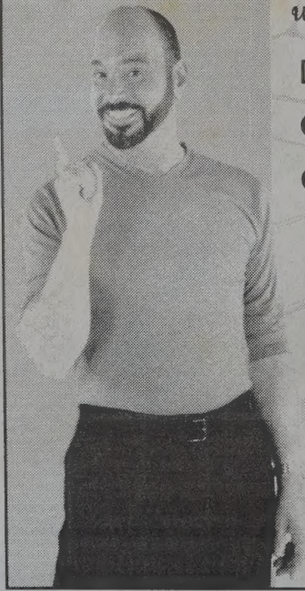

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local news

Backstreet could lose liquor license

City board votes to suspend dance club's license for 30 days; final decision rests with Atlanta mayor

By JENNIFER J. SMITH

Before its largest public audience in recent memory, the city of Atlanta's License Review Board voted Tuesday to suspend Backstreet's alcohol license for 30 days and fine the gay-popular club $9,000 over several drug charges.

Backstreet, a 24-hour private club located at 845 Peachtree St., faced the LRB, a citizen panel appointed by the mayor, over four counts of drug sales within the club and club-sanctioned sales of nitrous oxide canisters.

One of the largest bars in Atlanta and perhaps the best-known gay bar in the Southeast, the 28-year-old Backstreet became the latest gay bar this year to be targeted for "due cause hearings" by the review board.

Metro Video Bar and Colours have also had their licenses suspended or revoked in recent months, but board members vehemently deny any concerted effort to target area gay clubs.

During the same time period, only one predominately heterosexual bar — Park Bench at 256 E. Paces Ferry Road — suffered a suspension. The License Review Board recommended suspending Park Bench's license for 180 days for being open on a Sunday, according to Barney Simms, chair of the review board.

The citizen panel makes recommendations to Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin, who then has 90 days to act on them.

On Wednesday, Franklin's staff said she would not comment on how she may act on the recommendations concerning Backstreet or the Metro.

"The mayor has not received the recommendation on Backstreet nor has she seen the transcript for either the Metro Video Bar or Backstreet," said Gary Cox, deputy chief operating officer for the city and Franklin's highest ranking openly gay appointee.

On Oct. 29, the LRB revoked the alcohol license of the Metro, located at 1080 Peachtree St., after Atlanta police investigators charged the club with eight counts dealing with drug sales and inappropriate sexual activity.

Both Backstreet and the Metro have complained that the License Review Board charges focused on arrests made by Atlanta police at their clubs in 2001, which they were not told about until this fall when they received letters summoning them to the LRB hearing.

Cox stressed that the actions took place before Franklin and the city's new police chief, Richard Pennington, took office.

Backstreet co-owner **Victoria Vara** (left) and attorney **Jackson Cook** pleaded the club's case to the License Review Board on Tuesday. (Photo by R.O. Youngblood)

Drugs, not gays, cause for scrutiny, board says

At the public hearing on Tuesday, License Review Board members questioned Backstreet attorney Jackson Cook and Backstreet licensee Victoria L. Vara and deliberated for nearly two hours before handing down the recommendation.

"We're very disappointed, obviously," Cook said after the hearing.

There was a large public turnout for the hearing.

"This is the largest audience I ever remember," Simms, the LRB chair, said as the meeting opened. "Before we begin some of the issues surrounding this hearing are being played out in the media, including allegations that there is a conspiracy against gay bars.

"I can assure you that is not the case," Simms said.

Backstreet faced license violations over charges of three sales of cocaine, a second violation of "failure to supervise" for the separate sales of cocaine and ecstasy tablets, an additional "failure to supervise" violation for two additional cocaine sales, and a fourth violation for the sale of nitrous oxide canisters in the club's gift shop, according to Simms.

Cook said the club "admits to all the charges."

Two undercover officers testified out of the view of the audience that they made numerous drug purchases during two visits to Backstreet — once in March 2001 and once in November 2001.

"We've had a 100 percent success rate building cases," one of the officers testified.. "At one point I just stood in line in the bathroom with money in my hand and without saying a word was able to buy cocaine."

Two LRB members — Sharon Collins and Pat Dixon — proposed long-term suspension of the club's license, from four to six months.

Only panel member Warren Bruno, owner of Atkins Park restaurant, lobbied against a suspension.

"It's a first offense, and many other establishments come in with first offenses and get a fine," Bruno said.

Joy Barnes, a gay member of the board, moved to propose the 30-day suspension and $9,000 fine that Simms suggested. Simms seconded it and the board voted 5-1 in favor of the recommendation. Bruno opposed.

Barnes did not respond to interview requests by press time.

In an interview after the hearing, Simms said it was the number of violations and the severity of the charges that dictated the club's license should be suspended.

"In March there were problems [at Backstreet] and in November there were the same problems, even more," he said. "That tells me that there is a pattern, and that's a problem."

Gay bars targeted?

Simms denied the claims of several bar owners that gay bars were being targeted more vigorously than straight bars, and said he personally visited several of the establishments undergoing due cause hearings, including Backstreet.

During the hearing, Simms said most complaints he receives about gay clubs come from other gay club owners, "being competitive."

Backstreet and Metro owners dismissed the claim.

"I don't believe that for a minute," said Don Hunnewell, owner of the Metro Video Bar. "I know all the owners, and it's a pretty tight bunch."

While Simms named several adult clubs who had their licenses revoked or suspended this year, he said he could not recall an additional heterosexual nightclub that had been brought before the board for a due cause hearing.

"These suspensions and revocations might tell you at the straight bars the behavior is a little different," Simms said. "But the police go to all bars randomly."

Officials with the Atlanta Police Department's License & Permits Unit did not respond to interview requests by press time.

After the hearing, Backstreet staff called the recommendation "almost a death sentence."

"Do they have any idea the number of people that could put out of business?" said co-owner Henry Vara.

Simms dismissed the claims.

"I bet you they weather it fine," he said. "Patrons are very loyal to Backstreet."

The recommendation now moves to Franklin, who is also still considering the recommended revocation of Metro's license.

"We're still waiting, and it's like a jail sentence, not knowing what's going to happen to your employees or if your business is going to survive," Hunnewell said.

To date Franklin has only disagreed with one recommendation of the LRB, sending the recommended suspension of Colours back to the board for reconsideration, according to Cox.

Rather than deny or revoke Colours' license, Franklin handed down a 45-day suspension and encouraged the club to apply for a license as a nightclub, not a restaurant, Cox said.

The bar's owners filed an appeal and won an injunction in Fulton County Superior Court, allowing the club to stay open during the ongoing court fight.

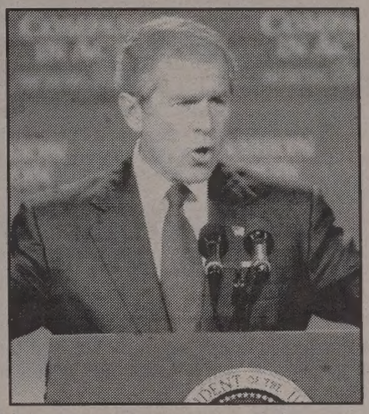
inside

VOLUME 15, NUMBER 45

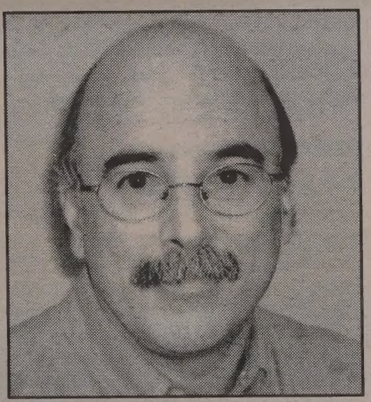
LOCAL NEWS 3
NATIONAL NEWS 8
FORUM 26
SOVO LIVING 33
HOME 49
PERSONALS 58
CLASSIFIEDS 60

calendars

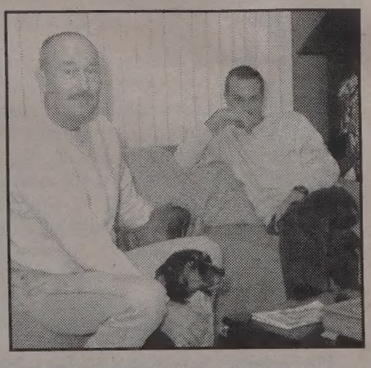
SPIRIT 20
NOTES 23



EXECUTIVE DECISION: President Bush signed an executive order last week on faith-based organizations that is drawing both praise and criticism from gays. **Page 13**



GAY OK: A recent study at Rutgers University led by Dr. **David Brodzinsky** reveals that the majority of U.S. adoption agencies allow gay adoptions. **Page 15**



PRACTICAL LIVING: Home But Not Alone paired up roommates **Fred Willett** and **Alan Huggins**, HIV-positive men in need of affordable housing. **Page 24**

local news

Gay center looks for new home

Facility splits from AIDS groups at shared site in search of cheaper rent

By CHRISTOPHER SEELY

Two years after several Atlanta AIDS and gay organizations moved into a shared building with great fanfare, at least one tenant at the facility at 159 Ralph McGill Blvd. plans to move out, and economic factors could force the rest to also seek a new home.

The pending changes will affect gay citizens who visit the building for everything from HIV testing and AIDS services to gay support groups and church services.

The former Methodist Center at 159 Ralph McGill houses the Atlanta Gay & Lesbian Center, its STD testing clinic, AIDS Treatment Initiatives, AIDS Survival Project, Positive Impact, two programs sponsored by AID Atlanta, and the gay-inclusive St. Michael the Defender Catholic Church, among others.

The AIDS and gay groups moved into the building in July 2000, touting the advantages of being under the same roof.

But now the gay center has definite plans to relocate to another, "more accessible" space, according to Craig Washington, the group's executive director.

Meanwhile, the fate of the other tenants is undecided after they received an eviction letter from their landlord last month.

Economic downturn hurt plan to fill building

As leaseholder for the 159 Ralph McGill building, Positive Impact received the letter from attorneys representing Inman Park Properties on Nov. 18, according to Paul Plate, executive director of Positive Impact.

Though Inman Park Properties sent the letter to Positive Impact, the implications also affect every tenant in the building, especially AIDS Treatment Initiatives and AIDS Survival Project, because the three AIDS groups are legally bound to each other.

"Our three organizations have a legal lease partnership agreement with one another," said Guy Pujol, executive director of ATI.

Positive Impact "holds the lease" for the three groups, Plate said.

The 10-year lease signed in 2000 currently binds the AIDS groups to pay rent for the entire six-story building, Plate said, allowing the partnership to sublet space to other organizations, like the Gay & Lesbian Center, to raise the $42,000 in monthly rent.

But half the building is currently empty, Pujol said.

"If we had to maintain that standard and pay for that empty space all three of us would have been bankrupt," he said.

The current tenants have not fallen behind on the portions of the rent that they owe, leaders stressed. Each group pays for space it is renting, but the vacant space is not being paid for, Plate said.

Including the money it collected from subleasing, the partnership paid Inman Park Properties $19,000 of the rent money for each of the last three months, Plate said.

Positive Impact signed the lease well before the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks that contributed to an economic downturn affecting businesses and non-profit agencies around the country. The Georgia United Methodist Conference had also just sold the 159 Ralph McGill building because it was building a new space in Norcross.

The Methodists moved to Norcross in November 2001, leaving a large, empty space that the partnership unsuccessfully tried to rent out to 22 different agencies, Plate said. But none of the agencies could afford it, he said.

Pujol said that when the AIDS groups first "negotiated the rent for this building, we got a great deal for the time."

But "within a year after we moved, the dotcom market crashed, the commercial real estate market plummeted, and our great deal became a higher rental rate," he said.

Positive outcome expected

Plate said that Positive Impact received an eviction notice from Inman Park Properties last month.

"We got an eviction notice that said we had to be out in 10 days about 10 days before Thanksgiving," Plate said.

Michelle Duchon, leasing administrator for Inman Park Properties, said that to her knowledge there was "no type of formal eviction notice."

The two sides are amicably working together to find a solution to the rent shortfall, she said.

"We are on good terms with Positive Impact and they are on good terms with us," Duchon said. "We have been happy to have them as tenants."

Positive Impact's lawyer, Jane Morrison, responded to the eviction letter and is in the process of negotiating with Inman Park Properties' lawyer, Carter Stout, Plate said.

Morrison declined comment; Stout did not respond to interview requests.

Positive Impact would like to make a deal to move to another building owned by the landlord with cheaper rent, or to stay at 159 Ralph McGill at a reduced rate, Plate said.

If the three AIDS groups — Positive Impact, AIDS Treatment Initiatives and AIDS Survival Project — do move, they will relocate together, Pujol and Plate said.

In the past few months, the partnership has looked at roughly 20 properties, the best of which is nearby at 139 Ralph McGill Blvd., a property also owned by Inman Park Properties, Pujol said.

"[Inman Park Properties] was willing to entertain our need to break the current lease if we were willing to move into one of their properties," he said.

Jeff Graham, AIDS Survival Project executive director, declined comment on the issue.

Once home to several gay and AIDS groups, the building at 159 Ralph McGill Blvd., will lose at least one tenant as the Atlanta Gay & Lesbian Center looks for a 'more accessible' location. (Photo by R.O. Youngblood)

Gay center to relocate

While it remains unclear whether the three AIDS groups will remain in the 159 Ralph McGill building, the Atlanta Gay & Lesbian Center has definite plans to move.

The gay center sublets from the partnership, but plans to move out of the building as soon as it finds a location "more suitable for community space," said Craig Washington, executive director for the Center.

The Center seeks a place with MARTA accessibility in a pedestrian-friendly area around the hub of the city where gay people live, shop and work, Washington said.

Though the current set-up on Ralph McGill provides "one-stop shopping" for the Center's "consumers," with an STD testing clinic, support groups, and the AIDS organizations, Washington said that his group's constituents want a more accessible area.

The group has begun its search for a new site with better visibility, a place "where you can look from across the street and say, 'let me go have a cup of coffee over there,'" Washington said.

Organizers of Atlanta's annual Gay Pride festival also had offices in the Ralph McGill building, but moved out in September. The Atlanta Pride Committee left its space at the facility mainly because the lease was up, according to Donna Narducci, Pride executive director.

"We found a space at Executive Park South that was better suited to our needs and was also less expensive than what we were paying at the center," Narducci said.

MORE INFO

Atlanta Gay & Lesbian Center
404-523-7500
www.aglc.org

Positive Impact
404-589-9040

AIDS Treatment Initiatives
404-659-2437

AIDS Survival Project
404-874-7926
www.aidssurvivalproject.org

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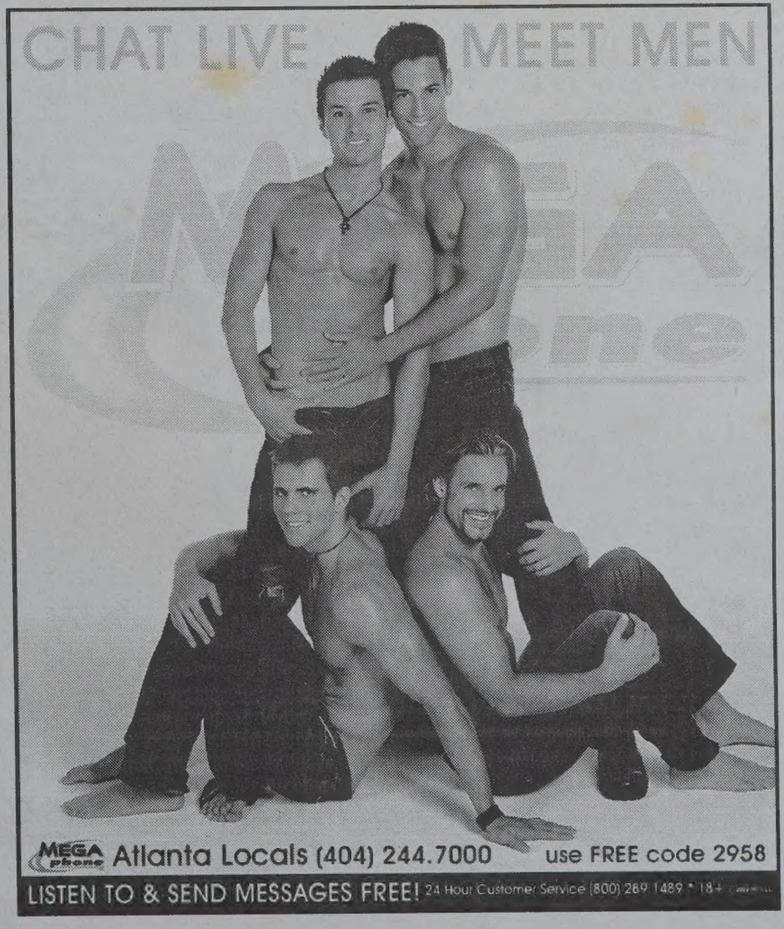
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guest editorial

Lessons from a gay bashing

Racism and homophobia both blame the victim: The black man shouldn't eyeball a white woman, and a man **shouldn't eyeball** another man.

By CRAIG WASHINGTON

SINCE THE ANTI-GAY BEATing last month at Morehouse College, one of the most revered black academic institutions in the nation has become the focus of national scrutiny.

Even after the district attorney announced he would prosecute the attack as a hate crime, Morehouse President Walter Massey has yet to admit to a history of on-campus anti-gay abuse and that this crime was motivated by the perception that the victim was homosexual.

Like most private schools, Morehouse will not voluntarily air its soiled linens. It has given the world some of its most celebrated leaders and scholars and prides itself on maintaining standards of academic excellence.

But the true mark of distinction at Morehouse is the sense of decorum and institutional loyalty instilled in generations of young men. The fabled "Morehouse man" is an enduring symbol of black male excellence that reflects traditional African-American values and the behavior codes used to uphold them.

SEXUALITY IN GENERAL AND CERTAINly homosexuality specifically, confound those codes. The emergence of contemporary black male homosexual identities and culture is forcing all-black institutions to reexamine rigid norms of gender propriety and the related constructs of manhood.

Many men, though they may not use the term "gay" to self-identify, are not ashamed of their sexuality and are constructing self-affirming oases within these black spaces. This is what is happening at Morehouse College, which for the first time in its history now has an official gay student organization called Safe Space.

This new assertion of self-legitimized non-heterosexuals has met with widespread resistance. Many straight Morehouse men resent the challenges to their heterosexist privilege that are presented by gays and women who will not be dominated, who will not stay in their place.

Gregory Love, the student who was attacked, was perceived as not staying in his place. His alleged gaze at another man's naked body traverses the boundaries that many heterosexual men feel entitled to cross when they openly glare at a Spelman student's behind. Yet because the gaze is unwanted and socially unacceptable and does not serve heterosexual need, it is a violation for which the gazer must be punished.

BLACK PEOPLE HAVE TRADITIONALLY embraced gay men and lesbians, but public dialogue about homosexuality has aroused deep-seeded cultural anxieties. We are troubled by the fluid nature of sexuality that often flouts the neat categories we've imposed to contain it. If student violence is a coffee spill on the cuff, troublesome but nonthreatening, then homosexuality is a semen stain on the dress (or trousers), loaded with indictment, buried deep down in the basket.

Many blacks who face racism daily are slow to confess the privileges they derive and the oppression they wield or support within their own communities. Some black men who are well versed in their analysis of racism do not recognize their own sexism and how black women are subjugated by it. Black heterosexual women may demonstrate an understanding of both racism and sexism and yet disclaim the parallel elements that comprise homophobia.

People find it difficult to prioritize forms of oppression that do not directly affect them. We often resist admitting to the privileges we access through our membership in certain "groups" — as whites, men, heterosexuals, rich people, Christians. It is easier to cite our status as victims, since it incurs little if any responsibility.

Race and sexual orientation are in many ways dissimilar, but both racism and homophobia are perpetuated by stereotyping: Black men are criminals; gays are child molesters. And both racism and homophobia blame the victim: Emmet Till shouldn't have eyeballed a white woman; Greg Love shouldn't have eyeballed another man.

Just as many white people rush to blame black victims for being brutalized by racist police, and many men question what the rape victim was doing at her rapist's hotel room anyway, some are searching for any culpability they can pin on Love, suggesting perhaps he had been sexually harassing Aaron Price, his attacker, despite any evidence.

If the act is warranted and thus not a crime, then we don't have to admit to our own biases and the power we have to enforce them.

IF A BLACK MALE STUDENT AT A mainstream college was beaten with a bat for looking at a white female student, you can bet that major black social justice organizations would be holding press conferences, marches and demonstrations.

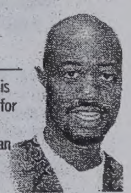
But no local or national black organizations have been denouncing the Morehouse attack. Massey recently announced that he had convened a "blue ribbon panel" to address diversity issues. There is only one openly gay participant among the handpicked panelists. Imagine how enraged blacks would be if a white college, prompted by the racist attack of a black student, assembled a panel with just one African-American to address racism.

Hopefully Morehouse and the black community at large will learn lessons from this experience. We who strive for social justice for all and not only our constituency cannot remain bound by the constraints of our comfort zones. Black people have to risk stepping into unchartered territory and look past oppression hierarchies — "your blues ain't as bad as mine" — that blur the common vision of the disenfranchised.

I was advised by a colleague to be patient with Morehouse since "they were not prepared to deal with this." Social change does not wait for us to be prepared to fight for it.

This incident is a calling and we must muster the courage to look first inward and unload the prejudice that infects us as individuals and as a society, right now. If civil rights workers had waited until black people were ready for freedom, and white people were ready to confront racism, many of us might still be riding at the back of the bus.

Craig Washington is executive director for the Atlanta Gay & Lesbian Center and can be reached at **cw@aglc.org.**



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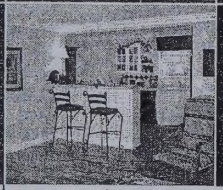
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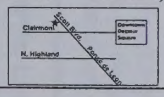

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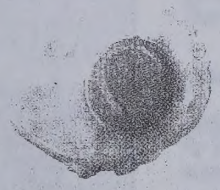
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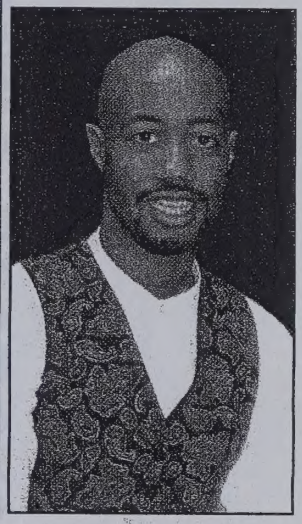
best of gay atlanta

BEST, continued from Page 9

been welcomed to a place at her political table. Second in our readers survey — and our editors' choice for first — is Atlanta City Council President Cathy Woolard, the state's first openly gay elected official, and the second highest ranking municipal officer in the city. Our readers chose Q100 DJ **Melissa Carter** as third.



Craig Washington is at the forefront of gay activism.

Local Hero: Male
Readers' Choice: Craig Washington
Editors' Choice: Jeff Graham

Coming in just one vote ahead of Georgia Equality Executive Director **Allen Thornell**, Readers' Choice Craig Washington epitomizes the strength of local gay leadership. Now executive director of Atlanta's gay and lesbian community center, Washington's career here has provided a lesson on building bridges: between women and men, black and white, young and old, and those with different HIV status. Next on our readers' list after Washington and Thornell was Enlight Atlanta founder **Steve Epstein**, who recently moved to San Francisco. Jeff Graham placed first on our editors' list, for fighting the good fight from his days as a street activist with ACT UP Atlanta to his career as executive director at AIDS Survival Project.

Dynamic Couple
Readers' Choice: Cindy Abel & Barbara Rubin
Editors' Choice: Kecia Cunningham & Lenny Lasater

Cindy Abel and Barbara Rubin, our Readers' Choice for dynamic couple, have been partners for more than six years. In that time, they've also made their mark

Please see BEST on Page 11

Gay groups prepare to celebrate MLK day

Pre-march breakfast planned for gays, allies

by JENNIFER J. SMITH

Gay Atlantans will join in celebrating the 17th annual Martin Luther King Jr. National Holiday on Jan. 21, marking the event by hosting a first-ever community breakfast before participating as a group in the annual Atlanta march in King's honor.

The Atlanta march marking King's birthday has included an organized gay and gay-friendly contingent for 15 years, according to Lynn Cothren, an openly gay personal assistant to Coretta Scott King, King's widow.

Gay participation in Atlanta's MLK Day events began when protestors opposing the Cracker Barrel restaurant chain's firing of gay employees decided to join the civil rights march, Cothren said.

This year, the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Non-Violent Social Change and several gay non-profit organizations hope to continue that tradition.

"It's important for gays to march because Martin Luther King Jr. was one of the key leaders in a movement that was about social justice and civil rights, in a lot of ways the same rights the lgbt movement has been working for very vividly the past 20 years and certainly since Stonewall," said event organizer Craig Washington.

Washington serves as executive director of the Center, a nonprofit community center serving gays that will co-host a breakfast for gay marchers.

The first-ever "community brunch for lgbt marchers and allies" has been scheduled "as a way of getting people together," he said.

Hosted jointly by ZAMI, a black lesbian nonprofit group, Congregation Bet Haverim, a Reconstructionist synagogue founded for lesbians and gay men, and the Center, the free brunch will be held from 10 a.m. until noon at the Center.

"I wanted to do something before or after the march to capture the energy and momentum," said Washington. "There are too few instances where you have such a wonderful cross section of folks interested in social justice that are willing to come out and participate. I wanted people to meet and eat together."

After the breakfast, marchers will convene at the corner of Peachtree Street and Ellis Street, the historic meeting place for gays participating in the march.

This year's march will be held on Jan. 21, beginning at 1 p.m. The march proceeds from Baker Street and Peachtree Street to the King Center on Auburn Avenue and Boulevard, where a rally is planned.

So far, Congregation Bet Haverim, Georgia Stonewall Democrats and ZAMI have all promised to participate in the march, according to Washington.

Gays participating in last year's MLK Day march included activist Craig Washington and members of the Human Rights Campaign, a national gay rights lobby.

Newly sworn-in City Council President Cathy Woolard, Georgia's first openly gay elected official, has been asked to serve as a grand marshal the event, but her appearance had not been confirmed at press time.

While the march historically draws between 2,000 and 3,000 participants, according to organizers, the gay contingent has recently averaged about 30 to 40 marchers, Washington said.

The link between the King family and gays is an old one.

Bayard Rustin, a close aide to King, was instrumental in planning the historic 1963 March on Washington and was openly gay.

Rustin served as a confidant, advisor and speechwriter to King during the 1960's, despite being forced to resign from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which he had helped create, because of his sexual orientation. Rustin died in 1987 at age 77.

Coretta Scott King has been a longtime advocate of gay rights, including publicly endorsing the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, proposed federal legislation to ban job discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

INFO

Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Monday, Jan. 21

- Pre-march Brunch, 10 a.m. – 12 p.m.
  The Center
  159 Ralph McGill Boulevard, Suite 600
  Atlanta, GA 30308
  404-523-7500
- MLK March, 1 p.m.
  Gay groups meet at the corner of Peachtree Street and Ellis Street
- After March Rally
  Martin Luther King Jr. Center
  449 Auburn Avenue, NE
  Atlanta, GA 30312
  404-526-8900
  info@thekingcenter.org

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local news

Hate crime at Morehouse College?

Gay students say homophobia to blame for attack in dorm shower

By JENNIFER J. SMITH

An attack that began with a glance in a dorm shower at Morehouse College sent one student to the hospital, another to jail, and prompted charges of widespread homophobia at the historically black all-male private school in southwest Atlanta.

Gregory Love, a junior at Morehouse, was beaten "approximately six to seven times, about the face, head, shoulders, back and arms" with a baseball bat on Nov. 3 in the bathroom of the Brazeal Hall dormitory, according to an incident report filed by the Morehouse College Police Department.

Love, a music major and member of the Morehouse Glee Club, told police that he did not have his glasses on when he went to take a shower, and he looked at another person in the shower thinking he was his roommate.

southern voice COVER STORY

"What you lookin' at?" the person said, according to the police report.

"I thought you were my roommate," Love said, recalling the conversation for the police. "I was about to say 'what's up.'"

Love then went to another shower stall and prepared to shower. The alleged assailant left and "returned with a baseball bat and began to beat [Love] with it," according to the report.

Love made his way to the campus infirmary, where a nurse called an ambulance. He was taken to Atlanta Medical Center where he was diagnosed with a fractured skull that required surgery to relieve internal pressure and approximately 20 stitches, according to students who have visited him.

Gay students from the Atlanta University Center gathered Monday night to sign a get well card for Morehouse junior Gregory Love, who was beaten with a baseball bat after looking at a male student in the shower. (Photo by R.O. Youngblood)

Love was released from the hospital Nov. 6, but remains at the Morehouse Infirmary, according to school officials.

"He is resting and recovering, and we think he'll be fine," said Eddie Gaffney, Morehouse dean of student services.

Morehouse sophomore Aaron Price, the son of a Chicago minister, was arrested Nov. 4 on charges of aggravated assault and was released from the Fulton County Jail the same day after posting bond. He is scheduled to appear in Fulton County Magistrate Court Nov. 20, according to Morehouse Police Chief Vernon Worthy.

Price was expelled from the college Nov. 5, according to school officials.

Neither the victim nor the alleged assailant is talking, but the attack prompted gay students and Atlanta gay activists to charge Morehouse officials with downplaying a potential hate crime — an allegation school officials vehemently deny.

The school has "a long history of hushing up violent and anti-gay incidents," according to Craig Washington, executive director of Atlanta's gay community center.

State Sen. Vincent Fort (D-Atlanta), a longtime gay rights ally, sponsored Georgia's hate crimes law. His district includes the Atlanta University Center, made up of four historically black colleges: Morehouse, Spelman College, Morris Brown College and Clark Atlanta University.

The attack on Love is "a horrible, horrible act," Fort said this week. "And I'm very glad to learn they've already arrested someone."

But Fort, a history professor at Morris Brown, also disputed claims that homophobic violence is common at Atlanta University Center schools.

"It's ... an incredibly rare act for the AUC," said Fort, who has been a student and teacher at the AUC since 1978. "And these acts happen everywhere, not just here."

Victim says not gay; school tries to squash forum

While rumors circulated around the Morehouse campus that a gay student had been beaten and gay activists sent out emails imploring gays to come "show support," Love said he is not gay.

"We went and visited him and wanted him to know he had the support of GLBT students on campus," said Erin Edwards, a Spelman student and lesbian. "We told him about our demonstration, and he said we should go do what we needed to do for us, but not do it for him, because he wasn't gay."

Please see MOREHOUSE on Page 8

Gay students ask schools for help

By JENNIFER J. SMITH

Members of ASSEFA, a newly formed group of approximately 20 gay Atlanta University Center students and gay activists, held a press conference Wednesday to call on the school to address "rampant homophobia" on campus.

"Our community wants us to take pride in our schools, to be proud of the fact that we are educated and black," said Tiffany Cherry, a lesbian student at Spelman College. "But how can we take pride in an gle day — sometimes verbally and sometimes unfortunately there were physical confrontations," said Justin Holland, a former Morehouse student who is gay.

Holland said he filed "countless" complaints, but nothing was ever done.

But Morehouse police officials said they were unaware of any abuse directed at Holland.

"That kind of abuse is unheard of," said Morehouse Police Chief Vernon Worthy. "If that had happened and he had reported it, I would know about it."

Worthy encouraged Holland to refile his conference]," said Elise Durham, Morehouse media relations manager.

Other students at the press conference also recounted violence based on sexual orientation.

"I was punched in the face because I am gay," said Gerald Wilson, a student at Morehouse from 2000 until this year. "This is modern day vigilante justice."

Activists called on Morehouse to publicly respond to the beating of student Gregory Love for allegedly looking at another man in a dorm shower last week.

"In the South, black men used to be

inside

VOLUME 15, NUMBER 40

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NATIONAL NEWS
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PERSONALS
CLASSIFIEDS

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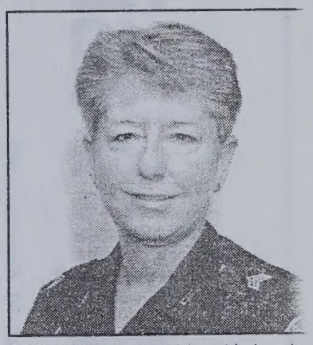
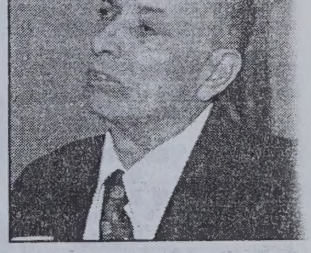
APPOINTMENTS



GAY LIAISON: Gay activists met last week develop a committee that will discuss gay i with Sgt. Connie Locke, recently named the Atlanta Police Department's gay liaison. Pa



DOGMA DILEMMA: Atlanta Rev. Abu-Akel F moderator of the Presbyterian Church (USA a petition by conservative church members discipline gay-friendly churches is 'a waste time.' Page 15

local news

Morehouse officials deny homophobia on campus

MOREHOUSE, continued from Page 3

Edwards organized a get-well card signing and a gay student march to Morehouse's campus on Nov. 11, prior to an already scheduled forum on homophobia sponsored by a Morehouse fraternity.

Omega Psi Phi sponsored the forum, called "Meeting of the Minds." Organizers said the meeting was planned before the Nov. 3 attack, but school officials tried to cancel the event just hours before the 7 p.m. start time.

The fraternity went ahead with the "peaceful assembly of students who just want to talk," but forbade any discussion of the beating, said an Omega member who served as moderator and asked not to be identified. An estimated 300 students and gay activists attended.

"We'll probably get our charter pulled for this," the Omega member said. "The college doesn't really know how to deal with all this, so their response is always to just shut it all down."

A Southern Voice reporter and photographer were removed from the forum and escorted off campus by Morehouse police.

Officials deny homophobia, hate crime charges

Attempts to stop students from discussing the attack on Love and to stop the press from reporting on it "speak to the deep homophobia on the [Morehouse] campus," said Donna Payne, constituent field organizer for the Human Rights Campaign, a national gay rights group monitoring the case.

School officials declined to officially call the attack a hate crime.

"I think that's premature," said Gaffney, the dean of student services. "The investigation is ongoing, and that certainly hasn't been proven."

Gaffney said he had "no knowledge" of Love's sexual orientation.

Love did not return calls placed to the Morehouse Infirmary, and his family in New Jersey did not respond to interview requests by press time.

Morehouse's police chief said the perpetrator's motivation "leaned" towards hate.

"It's certainly looking like [Price thought Love was gay]," Worthy said. "Based on some of the comments he made to us, I can see it going in that direction."

Price's family denied the allegation.

"Who said it was gay-bashing?" said the suspect's father, Rev. Jerome Price, pastor of the St. Paul Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in Chicago. "If anyone on that campus said it was a hate crime, I want their names."

Price declined to answer further questions, saying he would have his son's attorney call the newspaper.

Southern Voice did not receive such a call by press time.

A majority of students interviewed at the four private colleges and universities that make up the Atlanta University Center said the attack on Love was a hate crime.

"It's the atmosphere here, and the administration feeds it," said Ain Bailey, a lesbian and recent Spelman graduate who attended the Nov. 11 forum. "Girls get raped here all the time, and gay students get attacked and they just look the other way and hush it up."

Morehouse's police chief called the allegations "lies."

"They don't know what they're talking about," Worthy said. "I've been here six years, and there's only been one other incident like this."

Morehouse expelled student **Aaron Price** on Nov. 5, two days after he allegedly beat Gregory Love in a dorm shower.

Incident reports were not immediately available, but Worthy said a gay student was covered with a cloth and beaten by several assailants "three or four years ago."

At least some Morehouse students said they believe Love's beating was "predictable," if not justified.

"Students here know how to act around each other," said Tim McDonald, a heterosexual Morehouse student. "You don't look at another man in the shower, period."

Such behavior would be considered "a come on," according to other students.

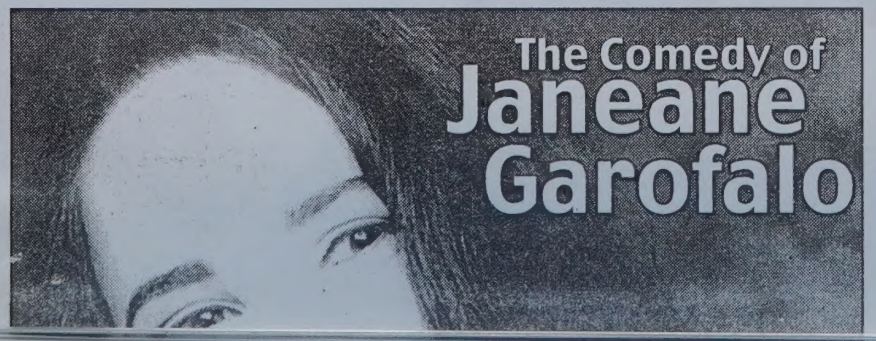
"It's an assumption that the other guy is gay, too," said a heterosexual Morehouse student who declined to be identified. "And men freak out about that shit. That shit will get you beat."

Morehouse officials countered that the school's non-discrimination policy includes sexual orientation, and regularly scheduled sensitivity training — mandatory for the resident assistants working in the dormitories — are open to students, too.

Morehouse doesn't offer domestic partner benefits to gay staff, but earlier this month, the college chartered its first gay student group in recent history, dubbed Safe Space, Gaffney said.

"I don't think gay students would feel unwelcome here," he said.

Neither members of Safe Space nor a faculty advisor could be reached for comment by press time.



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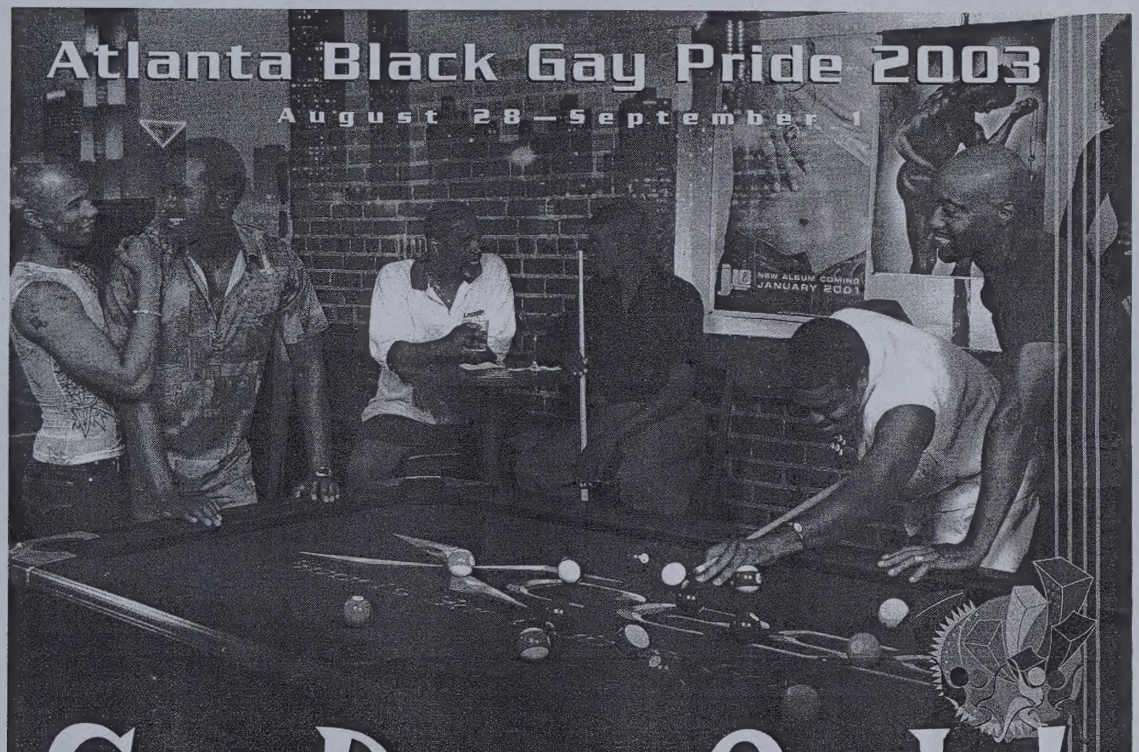

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MLK activities to remember King's court

Upcoming holiday includes events to memorialize gay top aide in civil rights battles

By CHRISTOPHER SEELY

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day on Jan. 20 commemorates more than just one man, said Karen Lawton, an organizer at Hands On Atlanta, the non-profit group that organizes the MLK, Jr. Service Summit.

The three-day Service Summit, set for Jan. 18-20, annually draws some 7,000 people to community building workshops, volunteerism, seminars and cultural events that celebrate the civil rights legacy and assess the movement's present and future.

The weekend that culminates in a march and rally on MLK, Jr. Day also "pays homage to not only MLK, but also the numerous activists that stood with him to create change," Lawton said.

One such activist, a contemporary of King, was a black gay man named Bayard Rustin.

Rustin's life as a pacifist and civil rights leader is the subject of "Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin," a documentary that Hands On Atlanta will screen next week as part of the Service Summit. The documentary airs on PBS stations Jan. 20.

Bayard Rustin (right), a gay civil rights activist, met **Martin Luther King, Jr.** at the 1956 bus boycott in Birmingham, Ala. Rustin is credited as the link between the gay and black civil rights movements. (Photo by AP)

"The film deals with who he was, what he came up against and people's hesitation to him being a leader of the movement because of his personal and political lifestyle," Lawton said.

Rustin helped shape the civil rights movement during the 1940s and 1950s with advocacy of Gandhian nonviolence that he eventually taught to King, but the movement frequently shunned Rustin because he was openly gay.

The man considered the link between the black and gay civil rights movements met King in 1956 at the Montgomery bus boycott and became part of King's entourage. After coming under fire during the 1960 Democratic National Convention from U.S. Rep. Adam Clayton for being an "immoral element" in the civil rights battle, King removed Rustin from his staff, and Rustin left the movement temporarily.

But in 1963, movement leadership entrusted Rustin to organize the historic march on Washington where King delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. That year, Rustin was attacked by U.S. Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.) on the Senate floor as a "homosexual, a draft-dodger, and a member of the Communist Party."

"Here was a prominent black gay man involved in one of the most important human rights movements of last century, one who was trusted and revered by Martin Luther King, Jr.," said Craig Washington, executive director of the Atlanta Gay & Lesbian Center.

Washington will facilitate a discussion about Rustin following the screening of "Brother Outsider" at the Service Summit.

"It's a matter of revealing the full role that Rustin played in the civil rights movement," Washington said. "His role was considerably downplayed, and part of that is because he was openly gay."

Washington also said Rustin's skin color played a part in his relative obscurity in historical records.

"Racism in the gay community also ... contributed to his erasure," he said.

In addition to the film screening, a pre-march Bayard Rustin Brunch is set for MLK Day. To date, Stonewall Democrats, the Center and Congregation Bet Haverim agreed to participate, Washington said.

"We want to show a sign of solidarity with the African-American gay community as well as acknowledge that MLK, Jr. Day is an opportunity for us to have a more unified and diverse community," said Rabbi Joshua Lesser of Bet Haverim.

Mary Anne Adams of ZAMI indicated that her group will also attend.

From the brunch, gay marchers will congregate at the intersection of Peachtree and Ellis Streets between 12:30 p.m. and 1 p.m., to walk together in the annual MLK Day march through downtown, Washington said. The brunch and march are open to the public, he said.

YouthPride also plans to participate in the march.

MORE INFO

'Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin'
Jan. 18, 4 p.m.
Freedom Hall
Martin Luther King, Jr. Historic Site
450 Auburn Ave. NE
404-331-5190
www.handsonatlanta.com

Bayard Rustin Brunch
Jan. 20, 10 a.m.
159 Ralph McGill Blvd.
404-523-7500
www.aglc.org

MLK Day Rally and March
Jan. 20, 1 p.m.
Peachtree St. and Ellis St. intersection
www.mlkmarchaaar.org
www.youthpride.org

CALENDAR, **Page 20** COMMUNITY NEWS, **Page 21** OCCASIONS, **Page 20**

notes

The Atlanta Book Club joins Charis Circle to present 'SisterLove,' featuring **Dazon Diallo,** on Jan. 15 at 8:30 p.m. to discuss the effects of HIV/AIDS on communities of color. 1189 Euclid Ave. 404-524-0304 or www.chariscircle.org

SATURDAY JAN. 11

'BURB BANTER: A potluck dinner for suburban gay men brings together members of Lambda Group, Northern Triangle, Gwinnett Guys and 7:10 Dinner in Gwinnett at 7 p.m. 770-457-5264 or LambdaGroup@msn.com

LOBBY for HOBBY: A citizen lobbyist workshop at the Feminist Women's Health Center teaches effective lobbying skills for would-be political activists from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. for $10. The workshop emphasizes pro-choice issues. RSVP required. 1924 Cliff Valley Way. 404-248-5445 or janelley@atlfwhc.org

SUNDAY JAN. 12

BEAT SISTAS: ZAMI's drumming circle, Drum Sista, reconvenes for its first meeting and practice in the new year from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. at YouthPride. $5 requested donation. 302 Howard Ave. 404-370-0920 or www.zami.org

UNSUNG VOCALS: Atlanta Gay Men's Chorus holds auditions at the First Metropolitan Community Church at 6 p.m. for the remainder of the 2002-2003 season. Would-be crooners sing one song to a provided accompanist. 1379 Tullie Rd. 404-320-1030 or www.agmchorus.org

FRIDAY JAN. 17

TWINKLE TOES: YouthPride hosts the Freedom Dance Party for gay youth replete with DJ, chaperones and free HIV testing from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. 404-378-6620 or www.youthpride.org

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community calendar

ATHENS

SATURDAY JAN. 11

GLBT TEEN GROUP. 2 pm. Presbyterian student center. 706-546-4611 or stock@negia.net

ATLANTA

SATURDAY JAN. 11

ARTISTS MARKET. 10 am.-3 pm. Midtown Promenade, 931 Monroe Dr. 770-913-3978

ATLANTA TEAM TENNIS ASSOCIATION OPEN PLAY. 2-6 pm. Social tennis for players at all levels. Piedmont Park. 770-621-2699

CITIZEN LOBBYIST WORKSHOP. 10 am. – 3:30 pm. $10 to learn about pro-choice lobbying, Feminist Women's Health Center Outreach Center. 1924 Cliff Valley Way. 404-248-5445 or janelley@atlfwhc.org

DUNWOODY POTLUCK. 7 pm. Meet and dine with great guys and sometimes women. RSVP to Bob & Dave for directions. 770-457-5264 or LambdaGroup@msn.com

FRONT RUNNERS. Meet at 8 am in parking lot behind Piedmont Park tennis courts. 770-621-5007

GEORGIA FIELD HOCKEY ASSOCIATION WOMEN'S LEAGUE. 9 am-noon. All skill levels welcome. Nori, 770-985-4903

GLBT ROSWELL. 5-7:30 pm. Unitarian Universalist Metro Atlanta North. Chenry8015@aol.com

HOTLANTA BASKETBALL. Men at 11:30 am. Women at 2 pm. New association, all skill levels welcome. Atlbasketball@aol.com

ZACCHAEUS SOCIETY. 5 pm. Covered dish. Confidential outreach to straight and gay citizens of Rockdale and Newton counties. 404-522-1444 or zachinfo@mail.com

SUNDAY JAN. 12

ATLANTA FEMINIST WOMEN'S CHORUS. 3:45 rehearsal. Druid Hills Presbyterian Church. 770-438-5823 or AFWChorus@yahoo.com

ATLANTA RAINBOW TROUT. 11 am. Water polo/swim practice. Georgia Tech Aquatic Center. 404-412-7777, www.atlantarainbowtrout.com

BLACK LESBIAN SUPPORT GROUP. 4 pm. Coming out support group. YouthPride Center, 302 E. Howard Ave. Decatur, 404-370-0920

DRUM SISTA. 5-7 pm. www.zami.org

GAY HOCKEY ATLANTA. 2:10 pm. Lizard Kings vs. Cyclones. The Polardrome, 4880 Lower Roswell Rd. Marietta. www.gayhockeyatlanta.com

GEN-X BEARS. International network of younger bears providing friendship and support to ages 18-35, but open to all. 404-635-9344, gagenx@genxbears.org. www.genxbears.org/atlanta

PFLAG RIVERDALE/METRO SOUTH. 3:00 pm. Metro South Parents & Friends of Lesbians & Gays at the Southern Regional Medical Center (Education Wing). Everyone welcome. 404-366-3675 or 404-370-7316. deejaymrrw@aol.com

POTLUCK SOCIALS FOR N GA RESIDENTS. Different location each month. 706-864-3229

SECOND SUNDAY OF ATLANTA. 6-8:30 pm. Discussion group for gay, same gender loving, bisexual, straight, transgendered men of African descent. The Center, 159 Ralph McGill Blvd. 404-523-7500

MONDAY JAN. 13

GRRL GROUP. 6:30 – 8 p.m. Ages 13-17. YouthPride, 302 E. Howard Ave. 404-378-6620

HOTLANTA SQUARES. High energy square dancing, no dress code, no pressure, no dance partner and no experience necessary. Meet at First MCC Church of Atlanta, 1379 Tullie Road. 404—432-1809 or hotlantasquares@mindspring.com

KIKI IDENTIFYING LESBIAN GROUP. 6:30 p.m. For women who play the range of sexuality, from butch to femme. The Center. 159 Ralph McGill. 404-523-7500

LAVENDER LIGHT BOOK CLUB. 7:30-9:30 pm. Borders Snellville, 1929 Scenic Highway. 404-874-8294

TUESDAY JAN. 14

ATLANTA LESBIAN CANCER INITIATIVE. Survivors support group. 6:30 pm. 404-688-2524

ATLANTA LESBIAN LIFESTYLES. 7 pm. For women who enjoy the company of other women. My Sisters' Room. www.belladona.org

ATLANTA OUTWORLDERS. 7 p.m. Interest group for gay science fiction fans meets at Miss Q's on Amsterdam Ave. for "Buffy" at 8 p.m. 770-451-8947. www.outworlders.org

ATLANTA PLAYLAB. 6-8 pm. Free workshop for playwrights. Peachtree Library, 1315 Peachtree. 404-872-8940

ATLANTA RAINBOW TROUT. 8:30 pm. Swim practice. Georgia Tech Aquatic Center. 404-412-7777, www.atlantarainbowtrout.com

BI-SEXUAL WOMEN. 6:30 p.m. The Center, 159 Ralph McGill Blvd. 404-523-7500

FRONT RUNNERS RUN/WALK. 6:30 pm. Meet at the CVS shopping center at the northwest corner of Commerce Drive and Ponce De Leon Ave, Decatur. 770-621-5007

HOTLANTA SQUARES. High energy square dancing, no dress code, no pressure, no dance partner and no experience necessary. Meet at First MCC Church of Atlanta, 1379 Tullie Road. 404—432-1809 or hotlantasquares@mindspring.com

HOTLANTA VOLLEYBALL ASSOCIATION. 7-10 pm. Open play for all levels. 770-621-5062

WEDNESDAY JAN. 15

ATLANTA LESBIAN CANCER INITIATIVE. Bereavement Group, 7 pm. 404-688-2524

FRONT RUNNERS. 6:30 pm. Meet at parking lot behind Piedmont Park tennis courts. 770-621-5007

PERSONS WITH AIDS (PWA) SUPPORT GROUP. 7:30-9 pm. 725 Lawrenceville Highway. 770-962-8396, ext. 28

RAINBOW CENTER SUPPORT GROUP. 8-9:30 pm. For Lesbians, bisexual women, and questioning women. 743 Virginia. www.therainbowcenter.org or 404-885-9776

RAINBOW HOME TEAS. Continental breakfast, 7:45 am.-8:30 am. Afternoon tea, 5:45 pm.-6:30 pm. RSVP by Tuesday, 3 pm. 404-486-9034, x104

SISTER LOVE. 6:30-8:30 pm. Atlanta Book Club joins Charis for discussion on HIV/AIDS phenomenon using the book "This Bridge Called My Back. 1189 Euclid Ave. 404-524-0304 or www.chariscircle.org

TEEN GROUP. Teen support group at YouthPride (ages 13-18), 6:30-8 pm. 302 E. Howard Ave. 404-378-6620

YOUNG ADULT GROUP. Group for ages 18-24 at YouthPride, 6:30-8 pm. 302 E. Howard Ave. 404-378-6620

THURSDAY JAN. 16

AIDGWINNETT & POSITIVE PEACHES. 7:30 pm. PWA & family/friends/partners/volunteers support group. Newton General Hospital, 5126 Hospital Dr, Covington. Ground floor in Cafeteria Conference Room. 770-356-5645

ATLANTA EXECUTIVE NETWORK. 404-724-9008

ATLANTA GAY MEN'S CHORUS. Rehearsals 7 pm. First Metropolitan Community Church, 1379 Tullie Rd. Atlanta, GA 30329. 404-320-1030 or www.agmchorus.org

ATLANTA RAINBOW TROUT. 8:30 p.m. Swim practice. Georgia Tech Aquatic Center. 404-412-7777, www.atlantarainbowtrout.com

ATLANTA WOMEN'S RUGBY. Practice 7-9 pm. Matches on Saturdays, no experience necessary. www.atlantaheatwrfc.com

BOYTALK. 6:30-8 pm. Discussion group for GBTQ youth 18-24. At YouthPride, 302 E. Howard Ave. 404-378-6620.

COME OUT DANCING, ATLANTA. 7 pm. Partner dance lessons in salsa, swing, waltz, and more. Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta, 1911 Cliff Valley Way. $10. 404-876-3950

COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS LUNCH. Noon. Community leaders discuss events and information. The Center, 159 Ralph McGill Blvd. First floor. 404-523-7500

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS. 3E D&D weekly group meeting in downtown Atlanta. Open to all levels of gay and gay-friendly RPG players. ajones@mindspring.com

FEMINISM 101. 7:30 pm. Charis Circle, 1189 Euclid Ave. 404-524-0304 or www.chariscircle.org

LATINO GROUP. 6:30-8 pm. GBTQ, ages 18-24. YouthPride, 404-378-6620

LESBIAN AVENGERS. 7:30 pm. Weekly meeting of Atlanta chapter, open to all ages & gender identities. YouthPride, 302 E. Howard Ave., Decatur. 404-978-1262 ext. 7744, or lesbianavengers@onebox.com

LESBIAN READING GROUP. 404-467-4278

GUYTALK. 7 pm. For gay & bisexual men 18-24. The Center, 159 Ralph McGill Blvd., 6th Floor. 404-523-7500

PEOPLE OF COLOR COMMUNITY NETWORK. 7-9 pm. Indigo Arts Gallery & Playhouse, 1850 DeKalb Ave. 404-378-7703

SAFE HARBOR. 7:30 p.m. Christian fellowship and bible study for gay men and lesbians. 770-717-9971 or404-622-8561

WOMYN'S GROUP. Ages 18-24 at YouthPride. 6:30-8 pm. 302 E. Howard Ave. 404-378-6620

FRIDAY JAN. 17

THE AGENDA Midnight. Gay Television. People TV Cable Channel 24. www.herounit.com

ALL WOMEN'S OPEN MIC NIGHT. 8 pm. Trans inclusive. Charis Books, 1189 Euclid. 404-524-0304

ATLANTA FREEDOM MARCHING BAND. 7 pm. First Metropolitan Community Church, 1379 Tullie Way. 404-622-0666

ATLANTA RAINBOW TROUT. 7:30 pm. Water polo/swim practice. Georgia Tech Aquatic Center. 404-412-7777, www.atlantarainbowtrout.com

FREEDOM DANCE PARTY. 7-10 pm. Free HIV Testing. YouthPride, 302 E. Howard Ave. 404-378-6620 or www.youthpride.org

HOTLANTA VOLLEYBALL ASSOCIATION. Evenings. Open play for all levels. 770-621-5062

UPCOMING/ONGOING

AFRICAN-AMERICAN GAY MEN'S ARTIST PROGRAM. Share a book, poem, artwork, play or song with other talented gay men. Weekly, 404-454-4582

AIDGWINNETT. Free no needles HIV testing. 9 am – 7 pm on the first and third Tuesday, 9 am – 5 pm on the second and fourth Tuesday and every Thursday. 725 Scenic Hwy., Lawrenceville. 770-962-8396, ext. 23. spencerk@aidgwinnett.org

ALWAYS ENROLLING. "Slipping & Sliding" safer sex workshop; "Boys Will be Boys" safer sex workshop for guys under 25. Gay outreach volunteers needed. Ben Hadsock at AID Atlanta. 404-870-7763 or ben.hadsock@aidatlanta.org

ASIAN PACIFIC LESBIAN BISEXUAL TRANSGENDERED NETWORK. Meets monthly.1-866-206-9069, ext. 2321 or aplbtn@onebox.com

ATLANTA GAY PARENTS. A group for gay and lesbian parents to discuss issues of parenting and discovery of gay and kid-supportive activities and spaces for unconventional families in Atlanta. http://groups.yahoo.com/group/atlantagayparents

COLUMBUS

MONDAY JAN. 13

CHATTAHOOCHEE VALLEY PFLAG. 7:30-9:30 pm 1442 Double Churches Road. 334-291-5153 7:30-9:30 pm or PFLAGpress@aol.com

MACON

SUNDAY JAN. 12

PFLAG. 2 pm. Open to the public. 912-328-0497

FRIDAY JAN. 17

CCAN Potluck Luncheons. Noon. Bring a covered dish to share. Diversity House Project, 2020 Ingleside Ave.

SAVANNAH

SUNDAY JAN. 12

FRIENDS & COMPANY. 6 pm. AMF Victory Lanes. 912-354-0658

MONDAY JAN. 13

BOWLING LEAGUE. 9 pm. For single lesbians and gay men. AmF Savannah Lanes, 115 Tibet Avenue. $10/week. Trey or Trish, 912-925-0320

TUESDAY JAN. 14

FCN BOARD MEETING. 6 pm. First City Network office, third floor. 912-236-2489

@ To add a listing, e-mail **calendar@sovo.com,** call 404-876-1819, ext. 34, or fax to 404-876-2709, attn: Christopher Seely. Entries should be submitted at least 14 days in advance.

occasions

BIRTHDAYS

"Special birthday wishes to our 9-year-old sweetheart Chelsea. We love you dearly, queerly and severely! Your loving Mamas."

Happy birthday to Window Media art director Rob Boeger on Jan. 12.

Happy birthday to Black & White Men Together members Larry C. on Jan. 3, George S. on Jan. 7, and Charles H. and David R. on Jan. 14.

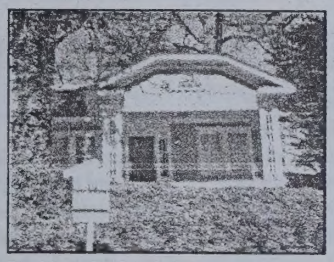
Southern Voice publishes birthday wishes, anniversaries and other milestones in readers' lives free of charge. E-mail your special occasions to occasions@sovo.com. Call 404-876-1819, ext. 19. Fax: 404-876-2709. Write: Southern Voice/Occasions, 1075 Zonolite Road, Suite 1-D, Atlanta, GA 30306. You must include a telephone number. Occasions may include photographs. Please include a SASE if you want your photograph returned, or send photographs by e-mail. Occasions are verified by telephone.

local news

Gay center finds new $460,000 Midtown home

Atlanta's gay center moves from Ralph McGill Boulevard site as other tenants consider options

By CHRISTOPHER SEELY



The Atlanta Gay & Lesbian Center and its STD clinic are moving to a new facility on 11th Street in the heart of Midtown. (Photo by R.O. Youngblood).

Altanta's Gay & Lesbian Center is moving into Midtown, leaving its current location on the outskirts of downtown after a long search for a more accessible facility, officials said.

The Center and its STD clinic will move into its new, nearly $460,000 facility at 170 11th St. next week, according to Craig Washington, the Center's executive director.

Washington announced the move Jan. 20 during the Bayard Rustin Community Brunch before the city's annual parade to commemorate Martin Luther King, Jr.

"The Center has been periodically looking for a new home," said Donald Smith, chair of the Center's board of directors. "We had been trying to position the Center in a more useful, usable space for some years now, but the actual search that we began last year has taken about six months."

The Center's move is another blow to an effort to house several gay and AIDS agencies under one roof at 159 Ralph McGill Blvd., which skirts both downtown, Midtown and easy access to the Downtown Connector.

Also housed in the building: AIDS Treatment Initiatives, AIDS Survival Project, Positive Impact and St. Michael the Defender Catholic Church, among others.

But visitors to the Center vocalized their discontent with the accessibility of the building on Ralph McGill, especially at night when the Center saw the majority of its traffic, Smith said.

"After having carefully looked at our options, we felt we'd be better able to serve the community by having a space where we had better control over accessibility and where people felt more comfortable coming to at night," he said.

Accessibility ranked high on the Center's checklist, but a central location bustling with gay activity was also a critical factor, Smith said.

The plot of land where the Center will relocate is a short walk from the intersection of 10 Street and Piedmont Avenue, an area heavy with gay-friendly businesses and new residential developments.

"We also knew that if we were going to get a site in the Midtown area, we needed to act very quickly," he said. "This was probably going to be our last chance to find a permanent home in Midtown."

With the financial assistance of "an anonymous backer to underwrite purchases of the property," the Center bought the property and now carries a $460,000 mortgage, Smith said.

But the new facility also means the Center will reduce its monthly rental payments, Smith said.

"It resulted in a net savings of almost 50 percent in what we were paying in terms of rent," he said. "This gave us hope of having a permanent location, which we felt would make raising funds much easier because people would be more willing to donate for a capital campaign."

The Center plans to complete its move by Feb. 5, with its services — including the STD clinic — open again on Feb. 15, Smith said.

"We're definitely looking forward to this and excited about giving people more of what they want out of a community home," Washington said.

Tenant troubles

The Center leaves behind a handful of AIDS agencies — and empty floors —when it leaves its current home at 159 Ralph McGill Blvd., vacancies prompting Positive Impact, AIDS Treatment Initiatives and AIDS Survival Project to consider other options.

The three AIDS agencies share a 10-year lease for the six-story building with Inman Park Properties. Signed in 2000, the document binds the agencies to pay rent for the entire building, said Paul Plate, executive director of Positive Impact.

The AIDS agencies sublet space to other organizations, like the Center. But for several months, the agencies have only been paying rent on occu-

MORE INFO

Atlanta Gay & Lesbian Center
170 11th St.
404-523-7500
www.aglc.org

Positive Impact
159 Ralph McGill Blvd.
404-589-9040

AIDS Treatment Initiatives
159 Ralph McGill Blvd.
404-659-2437

AIDS Survival Project
159 Ralph McGill Blvd.
404-874-7926

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MIDTOWN: 1747 Cheshire Bridge Rd. Atlanta GA 30324 404-607-9098
OUTLET: 6353 Warren Drive Norcross GA 30093 770-840-7056
CHARLOTTE: 2130 South Blvd. Charlotte NC. 28203 704-342-4600
*with approved credit. minimum purchase $500

local news

AIDS agencies may move facilities

MOVING, continued from Page 5

pied space, said Guy Pujol, executive director of AIDS Treatment Initiatives.

Last November, Positive Impact received an eviction letter from attorneys representing Inman Park Properties, according to Plate.

Michelle Duchon, leasing administrator for Inman Park Properties, said she had no knowledge of a formal eviction letter, but added that the company is currently in negotiations with Positive Impact, the lead agency in the lease agreement.

Duchon and Plate said in December that they would like to construct an agreement for Positive Impact to move to a more affordable space owned by Inman Park Properties or remain in its current home at a reduced rent.

But now it appears Positive Impact will make a move, just a short distance away.

"We're still hammering," Duchon said. "Positive Impact is still in 159 Ralph McGill, and we're still talking about when they'll make the move to 139 [Ralph McGill Blvd.]."

The property management company made an offer asking Positive Impact to pay $20,000 per month in rent if the ASO made the move, Plate said.

"We asked them to define what it meant specifically, and I don't anticipate any difficulty," he said.

If Positive Impact moves to 139 Ralph McGill Blvd., AIDS Survival Project and AIDS Treatment Initiatives will move with it, Pujol and Plate agreed. The Center for AIDS & Humanity will also relocate if the other groups move, Plate said.

"What we are going to end up with is a very, very interesting facility," Plate said.

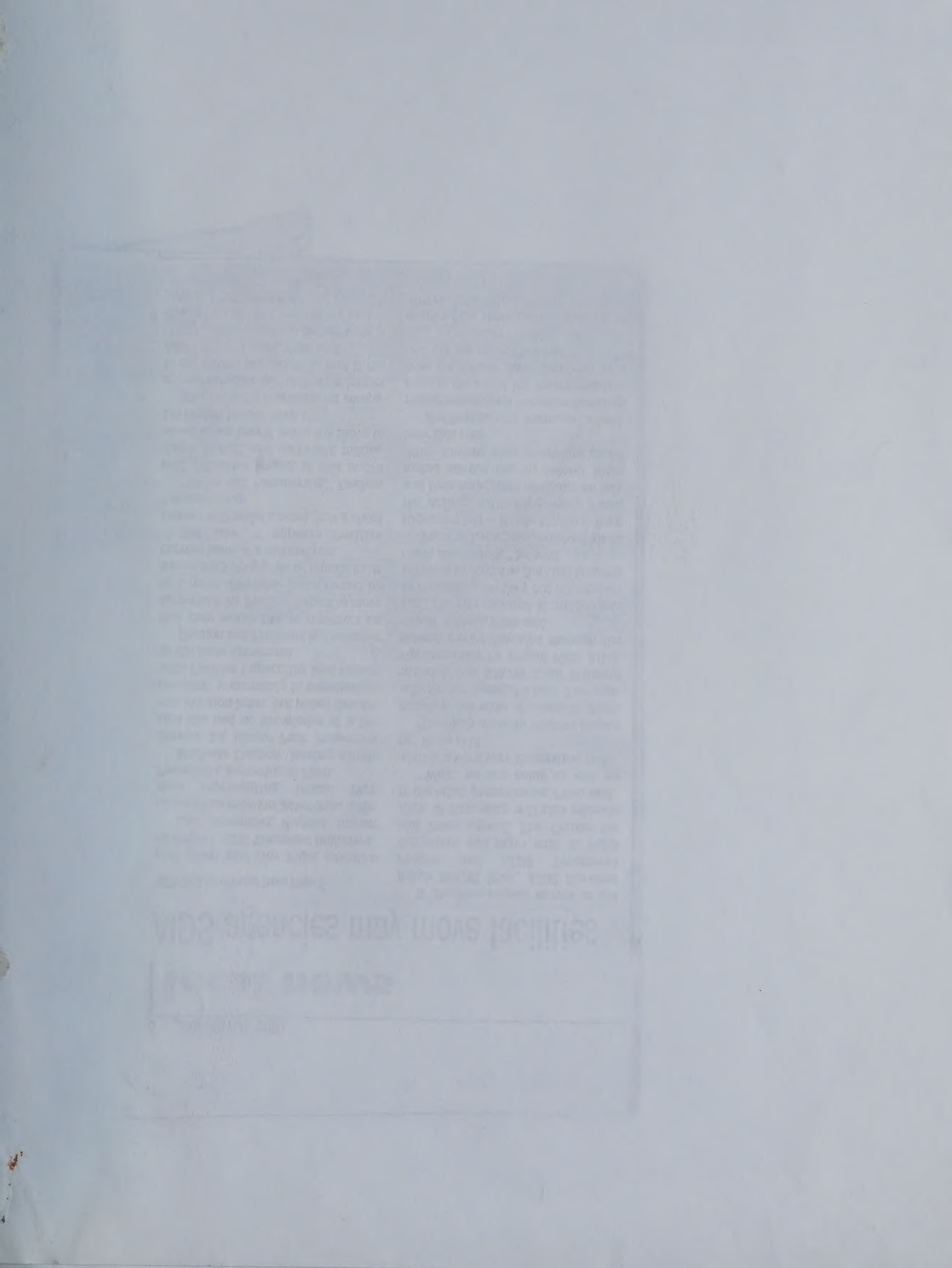
The likely move for Positive Impact comes in the wake of financial shortfalls for the agency, he said. The organization lost $49,750 from Housing Opportunities for People With AIDS, federal money funneled through the city of Atlanta, Plate said.

"The city received $1 million less in funding ... so they cut all support services to continue funding housing units themselves," he said.

Positive Impact also received about 50 percent less — nearly $17,000 — from the Atlanta AIDS Partnership Fund, and Pate anticipates receiving an estimated $60,000 less in federal Ryan White funding when grants are issued later this year.

The funding cuts warranted a fundraising campaign in December to recoup some of the deficit, but the organization does not foresee major problems as a result of the losses, Plate said.

"We're very stable," he said, despite "the challenges of moving in different directions."



local news

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By CHRISTOPHER SEELY

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Tenant troubles

The Center leaves behind a handful of AIDS agencies — and empty floors —when it leaves its current home at 159 Ralph McGill Blvd., vacancies prompting Positive Impact, AIDS Treatment Initiatives and AIDS Survival Project to consider other options.

The three AIDS agencies share a 10-year lease for the six-story building with Inman Park Properties. Signed in 2000, the document binds the agencies to pay rent for the entire building, said Paul Plate, executive director of Positive Impact.

The AIDS agencies sublet space to other organizations, like the Center. But for several months, the agencies have only been paying rent on occu-

Please see MOVING on Page 6

MORE INFO

Atlanta Gay & Lesbian Center
170 11th St.
404-523-7500
www.aglc.org

Positive Impact
159 Ralph McGill Blvd.
404-589-9040

AIDS Treatment Initiatives
159 Ralph McGill Blvd.
404-659-2437

AIDS Survival Project
159 Ralph McGill Blvd.
404-874-7926
www.aidssurvivalproject.org

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OUTLET: 6353 Warren Drive Norcross GA 30093 770-840-7056
CHARLOTTE: 2130 South Blvd. Charlotte NC. 28203 704-342-4600
*with approved credit. minimum purchase $500

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local news

AIDS agencies may move facilities

MOVING, continued from Page 5

pied space, said Guy Pujol, executive director of AIDS Treatment Initiatives.

Last November, Positive Impact received an eviction letter from attorneys representing Inman Park Properties, according to Plate.

Michelle Duchon, leasing administrator for Inman Park Properties, said she had no knowledge of a formal eviction letter, but added that the company is currently in negotiations with Positive Impact, the lead agency in the lease agreement.

Duchon and Plate said in December that they would like to construct an agreement for Positive Impact to move to a more affordable space owned by Inman Park Properties or remain in its current home at a reduced rent.

But now it appears Positive Impact will make a move, just a short distance away.

"We're still hammering," Duchon said. "Positive Impact is still in 159 Ralph McGill, and we're still talking about when they'll make the move to 139 [Ralph McGill Blvd.]."

The property management company made an offer asking Positive Impact to pay $20,000 per month in rent if the ASO made the move, Plate said.

"We asked them to define what it meant specifically, and I don't anticipate any difficulty," he said.

If Positive Impact moves to 139 Ralph McGill Blvd., AIDS Survival Project and AIDS Treatment Initiatives will move with it, Pujol and Plate agreed. The Center for AIDS & Humanity will also relocate if the other groups move, Plate said.

"What we are going to end up with is a very, very interesting facility," Plate said.

The likely move for Positive Impact comes in the wake of financial shortfalls for the agency, he said. The organization lost $49,750 from Housing Opportunities for People With AIDS, federal money funneled through the city of Atlanta, Plate said.

"The city received $1 million less in funding ... so they cut all support services to continue funding housing units themselves," he said.

Positive Impact also received about 50 percent less — nearly $17,000 — from the Atlanta AIDS Partnership Fund, and Pate anticipates receiving an estimated $60,000 less in federal Ryan White funding when grants are issued later this year.

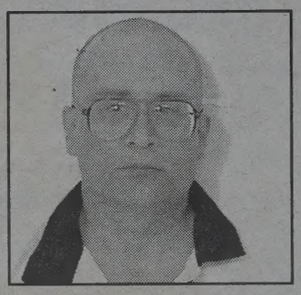
The funding cuts warranted a fundraising campaign in December to recoup some of the deficit, but the organization does not foresee major problems as a result of the losses, Plate said.

"We're very stable," he said, despite "the challenges of moving in different directions."

Death penalty upheld for cop killer

Fulton man also convicted for critically injuring lesbian officer

By LAURA DOUGLAS-BROWN



The state Supreme Court denied an appeal from **Gregory Lawler**, convicted of shooting two Atlanta police officers in 1997. (Photo courtesy Georgia Department of Corrections)

Ruling unanimously, the state's highest court on Monday upheld the death sentence of Gregory Paul Lawler, a Fulton County man convicted of murdering Atlanta Police Officer John Sowa and critically injuring Officer Pat Cocciolone, who is a lesbian.

"The death sentence in this case was not imposed under the influence of passion, prejudice or any other arbitrary factor," wrote Justice P. Harris Hines for the court. "Lawler's sentence is also not excessive or disproportionate to the penalty imposed in similar cases, considering both the crimes and the defendant."

In March 2000, a Fulton County jury convicted Lawler of opening fire on Sowa and Cocciolone on Oct. 12, 1997, as they attempted to help his drunken girlfriend return to his apartment off Lindberg Drive in Midtown.

Lawler shot Sowa five times, killing him, and Cocciolone three times, leaving her with permanent brain injuries, according to court records.

"Mr. Lawler succeeded in taking the life of one officer and nearly succeeded in taking the life of another, leaving her to struggle with the memory of that day for the rest of her life," Fulton County District Attorney Paul Howard said in a statement praising the court's decision.

"Therefore we feel it is entirely appropriate that Mr. Lawler should pay the ultimate price for his crimes."

Despite undergoing extensive surgery and therapy to regain her memory, speech and movement, Cocciolone was the star witness during Lawler's trial, which spanned more than a month.

"The man [Lawler] ran away when he saw we were police officers," Cocciolone said during tearful testimony that riveted the courtroom. "We thought it was funny. We just wanted to help the lady."

After almost six hours of deliberation, the jury convicted Lawler of malice murder, felony murder, two counts of aggravated assault on a peace officer, aggravated battery on a peace officer and two counts of possession of a fire arm in the commission of a felony.

He was sentenced to death for the murder charge, plus 20 years each for the peace officer charges and five years for each firearms charge.

Lawler's attorney, Michael Hauptman, could not be reached for comment by press time.

A date for Lawler's execution has not been announced, according to Eric Friedly, spokesperson for Howard's office.

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Forums target gay voters in Fulton, DeKalb counties

ATLANTA — Atlanta's gay and lesbian community center simultaneously hosted an Oct. 21 town hall meeting featuring U.S. Congress District 4 hopeful Denise Majette and a separate forum for Fulton County Commission candidates. "We facilitated the town hall meeting as part of our continuing effort to reach out to the GLBT community," said Jeannie Layson, a spokesperson for Majette, who unseated Rep. Cynthia McKinney in the Democratic primary and faces Republican Cynthia Van Auken on Nov. 5. Majette addressed the crowd of approximately 30 people for several minutes before opening up the floor to moderator Melvin Stringer for questions from the audience. "I talked to several people who were undecided before the event and said afterwards Denise won them over," said Roger LeVine, a Majette supporter.

Denise Majette, the Democratic candidate for U.S. Congress District 4, held a town hall meeting with gay voters on Monday night.

At the forum for Fulton County Commission candidates, Democratic Fulton County Commission Chair nominee Dean Chronopoulos coasted during the one-hour event without Republican incumbent Mike Kenn to debate, but there were several clashes between Post 2 At Large candidates Robb Pitts and Karen Handel. During questions about traffic congestion and Fulton County's funding of Grady Memorial Hospital and MARTA, Pitts, a Democrat, chided Handel, a Republican, for portraying different positions on the north and south sides of Atlanta. Handel in return challenged Pitts on the city's $85 million budget shortfall during his tenure as Atlanta City Council president. But the two mostly agreed on gay issues, including supporting adoption by gay parents and spearheading legislation to offer county employees domestic partner benefits. They differed only on an audience member's question about a domestic partner registry: Pitts was for a registry, and Handel said she is opposed "based on privacy issues." Chronopoulos also supported a registry.

Jennifer J. Smith

Ga. Tech offers some domestic partner benefits

ATLANTA — The Georgia Institute of Technology will begin offering limited domestic partner benefits next year. Benefits available to partners of Georgia Tech employees starting Jan. 1 include non-paid benefits such as access to the university gym, as well as dental and accidental death & dismemberment insurance, according to a report in The Wire, Tech's faculty and staff newspaper. Health insurance will not be available, and unlike legal spouses and other dependents, employees will have to pay 100 percent of premiums for their domestic partners, Chuck Donbaugh, associate vice president for human resources, told the paper. Approval to offer extended benefits would have to come from the state Board of Regents, which regulates employee benefits for all public colleges and universities, he said. Lobbying for the benefits came from both

Funeral home harassment case avoids trial

ATLANTA — A lawsuit by three heterosexual funeral home employees featuring changes of same-sex sexual harassment, gay pornography, sex toys and the alleged fondling of a deceased prominent Atlanta minister at a popular Midtown funeral home will not be going to trial, according to the plaintiffs' attorney. "A resolution has been reached," attorney Ed Buckley said Oct. 22. "That's all I can say." Representatives of the plaintiffs and defendants reportedly met late Oct. 18 and over the weekend, he said. Buckley declined to say if there had been a financial settlement, citing confidentiality conditions. He previously called the lawsuit "one of the most egregious" sexual harassment cases he has ever seen. The plaintiffs charged that Service Corporation International, the world's largest provider of funeral services,

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crisis when I got served with divorce and custody papers. She gave me names and numbers of organizations and attorneys who work in this area.

"I'm participating so my kids, who are 14 and 10 years old, can mix with the children of other gay and lesbian parents," said Warlick. "I really need the support and the ability to connect with other parents who are accepting of my lifestyle."

Kristin Dunham (left) and Ashley Anderson, founders of Gay and Lesbian Parents Unite.

The parents' group of Gay and Lesbian Parents Unite meets on the first Monday of the month at 6 p.m. at The Otherside Lounge. Gay and lesbian parents and their children are invited to a social gathering at Dunham's home in Alpharetta at 4 p.m. on the second Saturday of the month. Call (770) 663-4328.

Second Sunday offers explicit AIDS seminar

by DAVID GOLDMAN

The latest AIDS prevention information—including a live model demonstrating proper condom use—will be part of Second Sunday's June 15 safer sex workshop.

"We know what we need to do to prevent HIV. We want to explore the factors that are causing us to be inconsistent with that protection," said Carlos Cordero, a presenter.

Other participants include Dr. John Peterson of Georgia State University discussing his survey of young African-American men who have sex with men; Dr. Edith Bickers on HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases; and Steve Hazel of AIDS Education Services for Minorities on street outreach.

The meeting is free, but is open only to African-American men. Cordero promised that the condom model "will be large enough so the people in the back can see him, too."

Second Sunday's safer sex workshop is Sunday, June 15, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Atlanta Lambda Center, 828 W. Peachtree St. Call (404) 892-7096.

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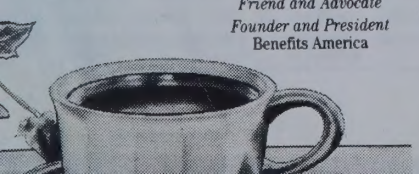

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Ten years of brotherhood

Second Sunday, a social organization for black men, celebrates a decade of sharing their voices

By CHRISTOPHER SEELY

Adodi Muse, a gay 'negro ensemble,' performed at the 10th anniversary party for Second Sunday last week. (Photo by R.O. Youngblood)

When two black gay men left for a 1992 weekend trip to Washington, D.C., they were unaware that their Memorial Day escapade would result in a flourishing organization assisting the personal growth of many metro-Atlanta black gay men.

In D.C., the men attended a discussion group that planted the seed for Second Sunday, which they conceptualized on the car ride home, said Malik M.L. Williams, chair of the group's board of directors.

Over the past decade, the idea blossomed to include 40 to 60 men attending discussion group meetings on the second Sunday of every month.

But the transition didn't happen overnight, Williams said.

"It really started with potlucks — black gay men getting together and talking about whatever came up around identity and life in America and Atlanta in general," he said.

Eventually, the membership grew too large to hold meetings in people's homes, so the group began trekking to AID Atlanta, Virginia Highlands Baptist Church, City Hall East and several other places before it ended up at the Atlanta Gay & Lesbian Center.

Second Sunday held its tenth anniversary party on Dec. 8 at the Center, with a performance by Adodi Muse, a spoken word "negro ensemble," and an open floor for any member to reminisce about the past 10 years.

In regular meetings, conversation topics range from relationships and internalized homophobia to HIV/AIDS and financial planning.

"A lot of times we get people who are really looking for the answers on how to make a relationship work," Williams said.

Most commonly, the relationship dilemma centers on longevity in gay relationships, Williams said.

"We are dealing with the dynamics of two men being in a relationship in a society that doesn't teach how to be in a relationship with another man," he said.

A specific concern with relationship longevity is finding a place for men to meet other men in an environment that isn't focused on sex, Williams said.

Second Sunday provides that space, he said.

Though the group doesn't presume to know the answer to every question, it does provide a forum for discussion, Williams said.

"A lot of the work Second Sunday does is help people deal with whatever is going on internally so people can deal with themselves to help them grow," he said.

When the conversation turns introspective, many Second Sunday members come to grips with their sexual orientation in the dynamics of a black family, Williams said.

"I think a lot of African-American communities really impact people's perceptions about how open they can be about their sexuality," he said.

Whether or not to be open about it with family and friends in a community entrenched in religion is a question that repeatedly comes up, Williams said.

"There have always been men in every community who connect with other men who are not open about their sexuality," he said.

Men "on the down low" is not just a black phenomenon, Williams said.

"It has become more publicized among African-American men," he said. "It has become sort of a catch-all term for men who believe that their sexuality is not something that other people could perceive."

But regardless of a man's disclosure status, he is welcome at Second Sunday.

"It is not a space with TV cameras," Williams said. "We do whatever we can to make it a safe space for anyone to come and talk about issues, concerns and challenges."

This month, Second Sunday will meet twice in light of the holiday season.

The extra Dec. 22 meeting focuses on the significance of family in the holiday season, comparing and contrasting biological families with families of choice.

"It is really a question of 'where is home?'" Williams said.

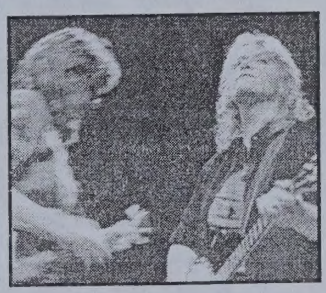
The two December meetings are an indication of what is to come for Second Sunday, which is transitioning to the two-meetings-per-month format, Williams said.

"We are planning for the future of the organization in a way to make sure that it will be around for another 10 years," he said.

MORE INFO

Second Sunday
'Home? for the Holidays'
Dec. 22, 6 p.m.
The Center
159 Ralph McGill Blvd.
404-523-7500
www.secondsunday.org
meetinginfo@secondsunday.org

notes



The **Indigo Girls** sing in the holidays Dec. 18 with Shawn Mullins, Josh Joplin, Fastball, the Jayhawks, Rhett Miller, Tift Merritt and Peter Stuart at the Tabernacle. Tickets are $36.50 and the show starts at 7:30 p.m. 152 Luckie St. 404-659-9022

FRIDAY DEC. 13-SATURDAY DEC. 14

SING OUT: The **Atlanta Gay Men's Chorus** offers a diverse selection of holiday music in **'The Spirit of Light'** at the Cathedral of St. Philip at 8 p.m. Bring a toy for donation to Atlanta Children's Shelter. Tickets range from $20 to $40. 2744 Peachtree Road, 404-894-9600 or www.tickets.com

FRIDAY DEC. 13

HOLIDAY SPIRITS: Lesbian social group **SWA-RA** throws a **holiday happy hour** at Blake's On the Park at 7 p.m. The party includes complimentary hor d'ouvres, dancers and photos with Santa's helpers. Men are welcome and a toy collection box for the Grady Pediatric AIDS Clinic is on hand. 227 10th St. 404-892-5786

SUNDAY DEC. 15

CHRISTMAS CABARET: **First MCC**'s Good News Messengers present **'Postcards from Home,'** a collaboration by the church's liturgical dance team, choir and orchestra. Reception follows the 7 p.m. performance. 1379 Tullie Road, 404-325-4143 or www.firstmcc.com

HOLIDAY SPARKLES: The **Atlanta Gospel Hour** comes together for the 11th annual **All That Glitters** benefit for Childkind at Burkhart's Atlanta from 6 p.m. to midnight. The event includes several local drag queens, local television personalities, a silent auction and a raffle. 1492 Piedmont Rd. 404-872-4403

WINTER'S HERE: The **GAIA Collective**, which meets monthly at Charis Books & More, celebrates the coming of winter with a potluck dinner and **Solstice Celebration**.